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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[“I AM AFRAID YOU HAVE LOST YOUR WAY!” THE STRANGER SAID, AS NELL CHOKED BACK A SOB.]

DEARER THAN GOLD.

CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE she had been at Ravensmere a week Miss Winter felt quite at home in the beautiful old place. Mrs. Lyle was kind and friendly to her, Sir Jocelyn treated her with an almost fatherly affection. Every servant in the house loved her; and, but for two things, the little waif might have been happy. One was the secret pressing ever heavily on her heart, the other was—Dulcie Lyle.

For almost from the hour of their first meeting the young heiress conceived a dislike for Nell. Careful before her father and aunt not to overstep the line of fair, though distant, courtesy, she yet contrived, in a hundred ways, to make her companion thoroughly uncomfortable; and, freed from the constraining presence of the Baronet or Mrs. Lyle, her manner was openly insulting. She seemed to take a positive delight in slighting the poor girl who had come to Ravensmere believing that she should be received as an equal.

There was nothing Nell could take hold of, nothing she could repeat; for though Dulcie made her completely miserable, it was by a thousand trifles, too small in themselves to complain of, and yet, united together, forming a heavy chain for poor Nell to bear.

It often seemed to Nell she had been engaged under false pretences. It was to be Dulcie's companion she had come to Ravensmere, and Miss Lyle took every opportunity of showing her she did not choose to have her society. Nell read the papers to Sir Jocelyn in the morning. She helped Aunt Salome with her needlework, and fulfilled many little duties that should have fallen on the daughter of the house; but to Dulcie herself she was perfectly useless. The young lady refused her companionship in her outdoor excursions, and never sought her society at home.

Something of this she ventured to say to Mrs. Lyle, one afternoon, when she had been a month at Ravensmere, and they were together in the morning-room.

Aunt Salome looked troubled.

“Dulcie is difficult to get on with,” she admitted, slowly; “but I had hoped, being so

near her own age, she would make a friend of you. I am not blaming you, Miss Winter. The girl has been spoilt all her life, and I think the best thing that can happen to her is to get married. I shall be thankful when Mr. Granville speaks out.”

Nell dared not raise her eyes from her work. Dick often came to Ravensmere, and Dulcie was very gracious to him—as, indeed, she was to his sex in general; but the companion had not forgotten the beauty's scornful mention of him the night of her arrival. She did not think herself Dulcie Lyle would be content to marry a poor man.

“Do you think Miss Lyle cares for him?”

Aunt Salome had very old-fashioned notions, and the wording of this question did not please her.

“In our rank of life, my dear, no young lady suffers herself to care for a gentleman until he has asked her to be his wife. Dulcie would not be so unmaidenly as to let her heart out of her own keeping until Mr. Granville proposed!”

Nell did not know her own secret yet. She did not guess the strange interest, the deep

regard she felt for Dick, was love; but for all that she disagreed with Mrs. Lyle's sentiments. How could anyone—wondered the little wifé—be perfectly heart-whole one minute, and earnestly in love the next, just because he was assured that love was returned? It was not Nell's idea of the tender passion at all.

"Miss Lyle seems so fond of grandeur," said the companion, slowly. "I should not have thought she would have cared to marry a poor man!"

"Well, you see, my dear," said Aunt Salome, "there's no telling Mr. Granville will remain poor. That miserable creature who deluded poor Mrs. Charteris into making such an unjust will may be dead, and then every farthing comes back to him."

Nell felt a new pain at her heart. She knew that in the months she had lived with Mrs. Charteris she had made no attempt to win for herself a single shilling. Nothing had surprised her more than her old friend's will; and yet she was looked on, even by those who had lost nothing by it, as a designing adventuress. It seemed hard.

"Have they heard anything of Miss Smith?"

She was certain of the answer, and yet she put the question. She wanted to know whether the search was still going on. Even then it struck her as strange Dick had never connected the flight of his aunt's companion with her own sudden journey from Hastings on the same day.

"Nothing!" answered Mrs. Lyle, who was fond of the subject of the missing heiress of Field Royal, "though a mint of money has been spent upon the search. Mr. Granville begins to think she must be dead, which is the best thing that could happen to her, in my opinion."

Poor little Nell! She went on with the piece of work in her hand, but the tears gathered thick and fast in her blue eyes.

She too, thought—had thought for years—that death would be her best friend; and yet it seemed cruel to hear another voice echo the wish.

Mrs. Lyle misunderstood her silence.

"You need not trouble about Dulcie's vagaries," said the widow, kindly. "Sir Jocelyn and I are quite satisfied with your conduct, Miss Winter; and really you are so useful in reading to him, and sitting with him when I am busy, that we should feel quite disposed to keep you here even if Dulcie married; so you need have no anxiety on that point. I never saw my brother-in-law take such a fancy to anyone as he has to you!"

It was quite true. Nell understood Sir Jocelyn as his own child had never done. She seemed to know by instinct what he wanted, and to do it.

She possessed the musical talents, which were almost an inheritance in the Lyle family, (though Dulcie, like her mother, could neither play nor sing, except in a very schoolgirlish manner); her voice was sweet and well modulated.

To listen to her singing, to hear her read aloud, were the chief pleasures of Sir Jocelyn's invalid life; and his manner to Miss Winter had a peculiar gentleness which he never showed to any other person, even his own child.

"You have been crying?" he said, kindly, when she went to sit with him soon after this conversation. "Who has been troubling you?"

Nell tried to turn it off, but he persisted.

"There is nothing the matter much," said the girl, reluctantly, "only I cannot please your daughter. I think, sometimes, Sir Jocelyn, that Miss Lyle almost hates me!"

The Baronet was silent. He sighed rather heavily, and after a long pause, said gently,—

"Do not let that trouble you. Dulcie is not the mistress of Ravensmere yet, and while I live no unkindness shall be shown you here."

She had met with plenty already; but she did not tell him so. She opened her book, and

was going to begin to read, but he stopped her.

"I would rather hear you talk. Miss Winter, do you know you never speak of your past life, of your home and relations. You are not a stranger to us now, and I should be much interested in your story. I want to know how it is you came to be a companion. I never saw anyone less fitted to buffet with the world!"

Poor Nell! She had a story; but it was not one she could tell to Sir Jocelyn Lyle; and yet how could she refuse his desire without making him think there was something disgraceful in her past?

Rapidly she surveyed her chequered life, and selected a few details that might induce the Baronet's curiosity, and yet betray nothing she wished to hide.

"There is so little to tell," she said, slowly. "My mother was always very delicate, and I stayed at home with her. She taught me all she knew, for she thought I should have to earn my own living; and when she was dead and my father was going abroad, I went to some old friends of my mother's, and they found me a situation. It is not much of a history. This spring I was in London, and in June I was fortunate enough to serve the life of Dr. Monkton's little grandchild. He and his daughter Meg were very kind to me, and they sent me here."

Every word was true; but oh! how much she had left out! Sir Jocelyn was quite satisfied.

"You must have felt the parting from your father very much?" he said, kindly. "Is he gone abroad? Is there any chance of his coming home soon?"

Nell's eyes filled with tears.

"Do not tell anyone!" she pleaded. "I would far rather people thought me fatherless. He had no love for me. He is fond of a daring, adventurous life, and there was no place for me in it. I am as much an orphan as though he were dead!"

"Poor child! What is your name?"

Nell started. Did he really suspect "Winter" was but hers by adoption!

"Do not look so frightened!" said Sir Jocelyn, kindly. "It seems so stiff and formal to call you 'Miss Winter.' I thought you would tell me the name you have at home. I am getting an old man now, child, and you remind me of one I loved and lost many years ago. From the moment I saw you I have felt the greatest interest in you for her sake. You must not think my questions impertinent curiously."

"Indeed, I do not!" She paused. She knew she had been christened Petronella, but she dared not breathe the strange, uncommon name to Sir Jocelyn, so she said, simply, "Mamma always called me Nell, and I like that better than any other name."

"It just suits you," returned Sir Jocelyn. "My wife would call our child 'Dulcie,' but I do not think my daughter quite merits the dear old title. You know, I suppose, it means 'my sweet'!"

"Was it after her mother?"

"Oh, no. Lady Lyle's name was Alice. You will see her picture in the gallery."

Nell went to look at it that very afternoon, and thought the pretty, childish face very attractive; but she marvelled how it could have charmed a grave, scholarly man like Sir Jocelyn. He must have been past thirty at the time of his marriage. His bride did not look more than seventeen—a vision of gay, carefree youth.

The sound of footsteps made Nell start. In another moment Dulcie stood beside her, a shade more than usual of amiability upon her imperious face.

"Miss Winter, I want you to do me a favour!"

"Willingly," said Nell, marvelling how it could be in her province to oblige the haughty heiress. "What can I do for you, Miss Lyle?"

"I was going to diancer at Dalesham to-

night, and Aunt Salome won't agree to it. She declares papa has invited Mr. Granville, and that it will look strange if I am absent. Now, Miss Winter, there is the most urgent need that I should send a message to Lady Dale—and I want you to take it."

Nell marvelled Dulcie did not send a servant or write a note, but she made not the least objection. She only said, gravely,

"I do not know the way to Dalesham House, Miss Lyle, but I will do my best."

"It is three miles from the South Lodge, almost in a straight line. You cannot mistake it," returned Dulcie.

Which meant seven miles from Ravensmere itself, counting the return journey, and it was now much past five. Nell felt her heart sink.

"Will you excuse my absence to your aunt, Miss Lyle?"

"Certainly. Remember, you must insist on seeing Lady Dale, and bring me back her reply, word for word."

"But supposing Lady Dale refuses to see me? Remember, I am a perfect stranger to her!"

"She will not refuse. Send in this note, and she is certain to see you. When you are alone with her—not before, remember—tell her my aunt positively refuses for me to come to her to-night; but she is to take my place, and put the questions I should have asked, and then you must give her this packet. Remember, Miss Winter," added Dulcie, with a strange gleam of excitement in her blue eyes, "you are not to breathe a word of this to anyone. I shall tell my aunt that I have seen you out on an errand for me."

Nell positively hated the new idea of her task. She had never seen any member of the Dale family, but she knew that Mrs. Lyle disliked the mistress of Dalesham House, and regarded her as a bad companion for Dulcie. In fact, the Dales were by mutual consent seldom spoken of at Ravensmere; and Nell did not even know of what the family consisted.

There was Lady Dale, Dulcie's friend, and Lord Dale, who was travelling abroad, and reported to be very extravagant and fond of pleasure. They could not be husband and wife. Nell fancied they were mother and son, though Dulcie seldom cared for elderly ladies. She had very much wished to go to London for the past season under Lady Dale's wing, but her father would not hear of it. So perhaps the widow was a very fast, racy old lady, as fond of pleasure as Dulcie herself.

Nell dressed herself. She knew, even if not detained long at Dalesham, walking fast she should only just get back before dark.

The maid, Clara, was in her room, busy with some needlework, and Miss Winter asked her carelessly if it were far to Dalesham House, for she did not quite trust Dulcie's calculations.

"It's a matter of three miles, miss, from the South Lodge, and it's as straight as a line. You can't possibly mistake it. But, surely, you are never going to walk there?"

"I must. I have a message from Miss Lyle."

"Well," said Clara, emphatically, "our young lady must think a great deal of you, Miss Winter. She's been intimate with Lady Dale ever since she left school, and this is the first time she ever trusted anyone with a message to her. I've known her to go to Dalesham House through a snow-storm before now, rather than trust to a letter."

Dulcie appeared to see Nell off, and repeated her instructions. The companion promised to remember them, and started, feeling she would far rather Miss Lyle had chosen another messenger, and with the strangest dread of Lady Dale.

On the long, lonely walk she tried to remember all she had ever heard of her, but it was no little she could not even form a fancy portrait of the lady she was so soon to see.

Sir Jocelyn always spoke of her with an air of pity.

Mrs. Lyle never mentioned her at all, but she seemed the only person for whom Dulcie ever cared.

She must be wealthy, for she seemed to travel a great deal, and Daleham House was a place of note.

Dick Granville looked very troubled once when he heard Dulcie was staying there; but, (if he cared for her), that might have been merely disappointment at missing her.

It was a long way, and Nell was tired, when at last she came in sight of the lodge gates; opposite them on the other side of the road was a small, unpretentious red-brick house—evidently modern—with lights burning in every window, for it was now seven o'clock, and the evening was dark and cloudy.

Nell wondered Lady Dale had cared for a house to be built so exactly at her gates, but she supposed it might be the residence of some one connected with the estate, and so she turned into the grounds of Daleham, and walked steadily on to the house.

It was very different to Ravensmore. At Sir Jocelyn's a servant was always in the great hall ready to receive visitors or answer questions. Here all was barred and fastened; there was no sign of human life or presence.

Nell pulled the bell violently in her nervousness, and was alarmed at the loud, prolonged peal. Another moment, and a man opened the door—a dark, sinister-looking individual, with an air of foreign extraction.

"Can I see Lady Dale?" He shook his head.

"My lady receives no strangers." In perfect silence Nell handed him the note Dulcie had declared would procure her an interview with Lady Dale.

The man respectfully placed a seat for her and vanished.

He was gone so long that Nell began to think that he had forgotten her, but at last a dusky-looking page appeared, fantastically dressed in crimson, and desired the young lady to follow him.

It seemed to Nell they walked through miles of passages and corridors before he stopped, drew aside some heavy velvet curtains, and disclosing an archway, begged her to enter.

The room was small and heated by artificial means till its atmosphere resembled that of a conservatory. All the walls were hung with tapestry, and a silver lamp burnt on the table. A lady sat alone on a sofa. She rose as Nell entered, and came forward with a charming smile, saying,—

"Pray sit down. You come from my dear friend Dulcie Lyle?"

It was surprise on surprise for Nell. Lady Dale, if this were she, looked younger than Dulcie herself—a creature of delicate proportion and wondrous beauty!

She was dressed in white, with a girdle of silver coins round her waist; her voice was low and caressing, and she moved with a marvellous grace; there was a strange, nameless fascination about her, and yet—Nell was not charmed.

Dulcie's friend might be lovely and engaging, but Nell's one desire was to get away.

No wonder Sir Jocelyn had refused to trust his daughter to enter society under this lady's care! Why, the beautiful Lady Dale looked as though she needed a chaperon herself!

How could she have been both wife and widow? And what relation could the Lord Dale who was travelling abroad possibly be to her?

There was not much time for Nell to indulge in speculations.

Lady Dale demanded her friend's message, and Miss Winter gave it word for word. A strange smile crossed the beautiful face.

"Was she frightened?" asked the lady of Daleham House. "I should have thought her too brave!"

"I do not think Miss Lyle is frightened of her aunt," said Nell, taking the supposed fear

to refer to Mrs. Lyle's anger. "She seemed very disappointed at not being able to come."

"Well, tell her I will do my best for her, but that it will not be the same as though she had come herself. The Lyles do not like me, and so I suppose they kept her at home!"

"There was a visitor," said Nell, gravely, "and Mrs. Lyle thought it would look strange if her niece were absent."

"Do you mean Richard Granville?"

"Yes."

Lady Dale tossed the packet Nell had just given her into the fire. Her beautiful face was livid with anger, and she almost hissed.

"Go back to Miss Lyle, and tell her I will have nothing to do with her or her concerns. She is playing me false, and may manage as best she can. Now go!"

Nell was only too thankful to obey; but how should she ever find her way through the labyrinth of passages back to the front door! She was terribly afraid of Lady Dale; but anything was better than wandering for hours about this gloomy house, so she ventured to ask if a servant might show her the way downstairs.

Lady Dale agreed. Her anger, whatever its cause, was against Dulcie, not the poor little messenger. She rang the bell, and the dusky page appeared. In perfect silence he conducted the young lady back to the hall.

Nell was not what is styled nervous or hysterical; but when she was once safe outside Daleham House she gave one quick, convulsive sob of relief. She could not have explained the feeling. She did not even know in what the danger consisted; but she was positive Daleham House was not as other houses, and that some terrible mystery hung over it and the beautiful woman who was Dulcie Lyle's friend.

It had grown much darker during her interview with Lady Dale. The day had been unusually hot, not a breath of air stirring, the sky hazy and overcast. Anyone more considerate than Dulcie would have remembered the threatening nature of the weather, and not have sent Nell on such a weary journey. A few large drops of rain fell before she was through the lodge gates, and when she was fairly in the open road the storm broke—loud peals of angry thunder, flashes of vivid lightning, while the rain came down with steady, relentless fury, so that poor Nell was soon quite drenched.

For one moment she hesitated whether to go on, but she knew nothing of the neighbourhood beyond Daleham. A repugnance, stronger even than the fear of the storm, prevented her asking shelter at Lady Dale's. She might have to go a long way before she came to another dwelling. Surely, therefore, it was better for her to plod on!

She was so wet now it made little difference whether she walked one mile or three. She never once thought that the lodge-keeper might have given her a shelter without exposing her to another meeting with his lady; or the next, modest abode opposite the gates might belong to someone quite unconnected with Daleham House.

Nell, in her weary, exhausted state, was incapable of reasoning. She only knew she feared Lady Dale far more than any storm, and every step that brought her nearer to Ravensmore was lessening the weight which pressed upon her heart.

On and on; but oh! so tired and weary, so sad and troubled! Why had Dulcie sent her on such an errand, when there were plenty of servants at her bidding? Why, oh, why, had she not refused, or, at least, referred the matter to Mrs. Lyle?

It was so dark, and she was so wet. Her shivering limbs would hardly do her bidding, and the rough road seemed endless to her tired feet. Clara had called it "a straight line," and so it was in coming, for the most part, but now Nell found herself suddenly at a point where four roads met.

She did not recollect it in coming, and though there was a sign-post to solve all

doubts, she could not make out the words. She began to fear she had missed her way. It seemed to Nell she should never reach Ravensmore, that some fatality was on her to prevent her return to that safe shelter. It was an immense relief when she heard the sound of wheels, and saw the lamps of a phaeton come towards her through the darkness.

"Oh, please stop! Please stop!"

She could say no more. Her voice was so faint and weary she feared it would never reach the driver; but he caught sight of the forlorn little figure standing still by the sign-post, and, though he could not catch her words, fancied she was calling for help. Flinging the reins to his groom he sprang out. The carriage lamps showed him a white, girlish face, and two large sad blue eyes. A lady, evidently, though it was passing strange to see one at this hour in that lonely spot.

"I am afraid you have lost your way?"

Nell choked back a sob.

"I was going to Ravensmore, but the storm came on and delayed me, and it was so dark I could not tell the way."

"Was your business at Ravensmore urgent?" asked the stranger, kindly. "You are a long way from there!"

"A long way? But it is only three miles from Daleham, and I seem to have been walking for hours. It is a straight line, so I cannot have missed my way."

"It is a straight line, but I think you must have turned wrong in the first instance, and so walked steadily away from Ravensmore. It is about five miles from there now!"

"Five miles!"

"Do not look so troubled," he said, kindly. "If your business is really urgent I can drive you there; but, indeed, it is not fit for you to go in those wet things."

"But I live there," said Nell, simply. "I am Miss Lyle's companion. She sent me with a message to Lady Dale, and she must be wondering what has become of me!"

"Do you know Lady Dale?"

"I never saw her till to-night."

"Well," said the stranger, and Nell fancied his manner grew more cordial at her answer. "We are only two miles from my house if you will allow me to take you there. My house-keeper can make you more comfortable, and I will drive you home at once. I used to know Sir Jocelyn Lyle well in my boyish days, and though I have been away from these parts for five years, I do not expect he has forgotten Lennox Dale!"

Nell let him hand her into the phaeton, trying in vain to resist his covering her dripping skirts with the carriage rugs. The mare sprang forward, and she began to wonder what relation her new acquaintance was to the mysterious Lady Dale!

"I have only just come home," he told her, feeling, perhaps, she would be more at ease if he talked as though he thought it quite natural to find a young lady wandering about in the dark. "I should have called on Sir Jocelyn to-morrow, but I think he will excuse the lateness of the visit if I appear to-night. He used to be very good to me when I was a boy!"

"I think he is kind to every one."

"Ay! He and my poor father were close friends, but he never took to my lady. Quiet Kentish folks seemed frightened of my brilliant stepmother."

They stopped at the red-brick house opposite the gates of Daleham. A pleasant, cheery old woman came out to receive Lord Dale. She shook her head over Nell's wet things, and declared she would catch her death if she drove on to Ravensmore in them. It would not take ten minutes for her to change them, and by that time the storm would be over.

Lord Dale seemed very young—four-and-twenty at the most.

He and Nell both smiled when she made her reappearance in Mrs. Brown's Sunday best silk, whose body hung in plaits on her slender figure; and, somehow, over that smile

they grew friends. There was something almost boyish in the young Earl's mirth.

"I shall never forget our first meeting, Miss Winter," he said, as he handed her back to the phaeton. "I hope Mrs. Brown feels honoured. Now, don't look so troubled; my horse is very fresh, and we shall be at Ravensmere in half-an-hour. It won't be much past nine then."

"I am afraid Miss Lyle will be put out."

"Well, then, she should send someone else on her errands. Is the fair Dulcie as much of a tyrant as ever? She used to be a most imperious little girl!"

"She is very pretty."

"Then she has altered. She used to be like a wax doll. And so she and my stepmother are cronies! That means she won't like me. Lady Dale and I are at open warfare."

"Why?" asked Nell. Then, as she remembered the rudeness of the curiosity, as it might be thought, "I beg your pardon. I should not have said that."

"My dear Miss Winter, all the county knows it. I am an Englishman at the backbone, and I hate foreign ways. Lady Dale has nothing English about her. She fascinated my father, and he married her. He left her all he could possibly leave away from me; but I don't grudge her that. What I do mind is that she has the use of Dalesham House for her life. I think she is younger than I am, so the chances are I shall never set foot in my birthplace. I am not saying anything against Lady Dale. She may have good qualities, (from Sir Jocelyn letting Miss Lyle visit her she probably has), but I don't like her, and I never shall!"

Nell's reappearance at Ravensmere went off better than she had hoped for. Mrs. Lyle herself went with her to her own room to make sure she took due precaution against cold; and all she said by way of reproof was,—

"It is my fault, for I ought to have warned you; but, Miss Winter, in future never agree to go to Dalesham House. For her husband's sake we cannot openly break off all acquaintance with Lady Dale; but Sir Jocelyn objects to her companionship for Dulcie, and we wish to do all in our power to lessen the intimacy."

"I will never go there again. She frightened me!"

When Nell was in bed she had an unexpected visitor. Miss Lyle came in to demand the result of her visit.

"I think you are a perfect idiot," she said angrily. "What possessed you to tell Lady Dale I stayed at home on Dick Granville's account!"

"She seemed so angry at your failing her, and asked if you were afraid, so I told her it was not your fault, as you had visitors."

Dulcie looked less aggrieved.

"That would have been right enough if you had not said which visitor. Don't you see, you have made her think Mr. Granville and I are engaged to each other?"

It was on Nell's lips to ask what right Lady Dale would have to object if such were the case, but Dulcie's next words drove all other thoughts from her mind.

"I daresay you meant well, but you don't know the mischief you have done. I care as little for Mr. Granville as he does for me. I shouldn't mind if he married Miss Smith to-morrow, supposing she could come to life again for the purpose. And now perhaps you have made Zee refuse to help me any more?"

Nell spent a sleepless night. What did it all mean?

Why should the idea of Dulcie marrying Mr. Granville make Lady Dale angry? And what help could Sir Jocelyn's heiress possibly require from the strange fantastic beauty who had raised in Nell's breast such a strange terror?

persuasions of her three daughters. She was a gentle, rather helpless old lady, who troubled herself very little about the outside world; and so that her flowers succeeded in summer, and the rooms were kept fairly warm in winter, she interfered very little with the "girls'" management, but suffered them to govern The Laurels and herself pretty much as they pleased.

Now the Misses Granville, though some years ago they had scoffed at their brother Bob's suggestion of their earning their own living, and had been content to let their mother live fully up to their income, were yet by no means simpletons, and, indeed, possessed an excellent idea of the value of money.

They would have been perfectly willing to owe everything to Dick; but now that there seemed every prospect of Dick being a poor man all his days they had sense enough to see something must be done. Boarders seemed the easiest speculation; it involved no loss of caste, cost no great outlay, and did not require any one of the sisters to be preferred beyond the others.

All three were fond of each other, for their interests had never clashed; but if one had stayed at home in comfort, and the others gone out into the world, their attachment would have been "strained," to say the least of it.

So the decision was made. Boarders must be found—middle-aged men by preference, for very early breakfasts and strictly moderate terms would, (despite the advertisement), not have pleased the ladies.

Young men required to go to London sometimes, and if they lodged thirty miles away, expected some equivalent in the way of low rent. Besides, with the most hopeful view of their own attractions, the three sisters knew they were past their first youth.

Georgina, the youngest, was thirty-four; Marion was forty, Laura came between. They were comely, well-preserved women, and a well-to-do bachelor, (or widower), of fifty might have done worse than marry any one of them.

Perhaps this idea had occurred to them, for from the first they agreed that young men were exacting and troublesome. A calm, middle-aged person would suit them far better.

The first day after the advertisement appeared the three sisters and their mother sat in state in the drawing-room, for they believed all applications would be made personally.

But no one came, even to make inquiries. Then they decided the gentlemen meant to write first to save disappointment, but the next day's post brought no letters. Another afternoon and evening of sitting in state, and no result, made them all desperately cross. By the third day they regarded the advertisement as a failure, and took up their usual employments.

Laura was in the garden, Marion had taken her mother for a drive, and Georgina was reading a novel from the circulating library—for the Miss Granvilles were human in that respect, and dearly loved a romance—perhaps, poor things, because there had been none in their own dull, grey lives.

The novel was so exciting that Georgina never heard a knock at the door, and the maid actually ushered in an old gentleman before she realised what was happening.

"Oh! why had she not her best dress on? Oh! why was her mother out? But the stranger seemed quite unconscious of her tribulation."

Bowing with an air of highbred courtesy, he told her he had seen the advertisement, but waited to confer with a friend of his before making any inquiries.

He was not very robust. He had no very near relations, and this friend was almost like a son to him.

He had fancied from the advertisement Mrs. Granville might be able to accommodate them both for the rest of the summer, or say for two months.

He was well aware chance-comers like that must expect to pay more than permanent inmates, but he was possessed of fair means. Mr. Hastings, his friend, would be obliged to go abroad in September. It was possible he should accompany him, so that he could only make temporary arrangements. Was it likely Mrs. Granville would agree to them?

Georgina sent for Laura. She really felt incapable of settling anything herself. Laura was delighted with Mr. Reynolds—so kind, so urbane and affable!

The old gentleman on his side seemed pleased with The Laurels. He was fond of a garden, he said, and enjoyed a rubber of whist.

His friend loved music, and played a little on the flute. If the young ladies thought there was any chance of their mother's consent he should be happy to await Mrs. Granville's return.

He could offer them the highest references, or, if they preferred it, he would gladly pay the terms in advance. Did they think five pounds a-week for the two would satisfy them?

Laura and Georgina, in a duet, declared that sum would be ample, and they could answer for their mother's consent. There was no occasion to pay the terms in advance, and as to references one would be ample.

Mr. Reynolds gave them a card inscribed General Bouvierie, Langham Hotel—an old friend, he said, of his, who would answer any questions. And then he bowed himself out, first premising he and Mr. Hastings would like to come that day week if quite convenient.

When Mrs. Granville and Marion returned they received enchanting accounts of Mr. Reynolds.

General Bouvierie's answer came by return of post, describing his old friend as one of the kindest and worthiest of men, while Captain Hastings was an honour to his profession.

A few simple preparations were made at The Laurels; and the ladies, in an agony of expectation, awaited their boarders.

Presently the two friends arrived, and Captain Hastings proved quite as delightful as his companion.

He requested them to drop the "Captain." He was in an American army, and preferred to be plain "Mr." Hastings while in England.

He was a very handsome, military-looking man, and seemed devoted to his old friend. He declared The Laurels was the picture of an English home.

He only wished he had found such an abode before his trip to England was so nearly over. He played bâleque with Georgina, while the others had a rubber. He accompanied Marion on the flute when she played an old fantasia.

Mr. Reynolds told delightful anecdotes of his foreign travels. In short, the two gentlemen made themselves so agreeable that the ladies sat up an hour beyond their usual time; and then, in their own rooms, congratulated themselves on their delightful boarders.

Perhaps they would not have been quite so satisfied could they have followed "Captain" Hastings into his friend's bedroom, when the silence which had crept over the house made him think everyone was asleep.

Mr. Reynolds, (the grey wig reposing on the table), was smoking a short pipe, his head half out of the window, so that the fumes of the tobacco might not impregnate the room.

Hastings carefully locked the door, and seated himself opposite. The house was double-fronted, and the ladies' rooms all on the opposite side, so they ran little fear of their conversation being overheard.

Another conversation of theirs had been overheard not so very long before, and to good purpose; for these were the two men Dick Granville had heard plotting against poor Nell on the esplanade at Hastings.

They had a deeper plot on hand now, and one that required no little skill and cunning to carry out.

(To be continued.)

CHAPTER X.

MRS. GRANVILLE would never have inserted that advertisement in the *Times* but for the

EDEN'S SACRIFICE.

—:-

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DAPPER young man in grey tweed ascended the steps of Mr. Bruce's residence, and pulled the bell vigorously.

"Does Mr. Bruce live here?" he asked of the servant who answered.

"Yes, sir."

"Is he in?"

"No, sir."

"Is Mr. Gordon in?"

"Mr. Gordon does not live here, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir. He did live here, but has not been here for several weeks."

"That is queer."

"Oh, I am mistaken, sir! Mr. Gordon was here one night about ten days ago. I had forgotten it."

"Was he alone?"

"No. His wife was with him. They remained over night, leaving the following morning about six, to catch an early train."

"Do you know where they went?"

"No, sir."

"I am very anxious to see Mr. Gordon, and would make it worth your while to find out where he is for me if you can."

"I'm afraid it will be impossible, sir."

"Why?"

"Because I have no means of discovering."

"Can you tell me when Mr. Bruce will be home?"

"I cannot, sir. He is away on a business trip. We are uneasy about him, as we have heard nothing from him for two weeks, and don't know where he is."

"And Mrs. Bruce, where is she?"

"In bed, sir; ill with brain fever."

The visitor gnawed his moustache thoughtfully.

"I was particularly anxious to see Mr. Gordon," he said. "Can you tell me where to find Jim Lewis?"

"Jim Lewis, sir?"

The girl had started slightly.

"Yes."

"You mean Mr. Gordon's valet?"

"Yes."

"He—he has gone too."

"Is not your name Catherine?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you must know where Lewis is, for he is your *fiance*. Look here, my girl. It is almost essential that I should find Gordon, and if you will tell me where Jim Lewis is I shall succeed. Can I trust you? Do you know Jim Lewis's business?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective drew a trifle closer to her.

"Very well. If you know," he whispered, "and can keep your mouth shut, I don't mind telling you that we've got a big crib to crack if we can only get hold of Gordon. Without him we're all dished."

The woman looked at the man curiously. She knew all of Gordon and Bruce's "pals" well, both high and low, but she had never seen that one among the number. Something about the man's eye struck her. She could never remember exactly what, but it seemed a trifle too sharp. He was deservous to see not only her face but the interior of the hall as well. She didn't like it, and drew herself up curiously.

"Jim Lewis and I had a row, sir, and he has gone, the devil knows where. I don't know nothing about him, and I don't want to. It was a finding out that he was a thief that made me send him to the rightabout, and it was that same that made Mr. Bruce give Mr. Gordon the bonus, though I don't suppose as I ought to tell you. Mr. Bruce is a gentleman as was a friend of Mr. Gordon's till he found him out, and he'd call a policeman quicker than a wink to arrest you if he'd find you at his door. You'd better go, if you know which side of your bread is buttered, and the next

time you have a 'crib to crack,' crack it yourself, and don't come bothering honest folks about it."

The speech was delivered so vociferously that the detective was completely bewildered.

A red spot burned in either of the girl's cheeks, and her eyes snapped.

He made one more attempt.

"You must know some one that knows Lewis. If you can in any way help me to find him I'll give you ten pounds."

"If you don't git out of here I'll hand you over to the police, that's what I'll do. If you want to find out about anything, you go to the person that told you he was engaged to me, and ask. Now I'm done."

The officer saw that further effort was useless. He did not dream that the girl suspected him, and was therefore nonplussed. He turned away thoughtfully, and while still standing upon the top step of the high stoop, the girl slammed the door.

She stood watching him through the glass, and suddenly saw him start and look downward. She followed the direction of his glance, and saw that the man he wanted had emerged from the basement door, and was starting down the street.

The detective followed.

Catherine's heart leaped until it almost choked her. She opened the door and saw the detective was shadowing the man. She understood the situation like a flash. If the man with whom she had been speaking had really wished to see Lewis for the purpose he named, he would have overtaken him at once.

She sprang back, closed the door, and rushed through the hall, nearly knocking a man down, but scarcely seeing him.

"Charlie," she cried, entering her own room, "do you know where you uncle Jim has gone?"

"Yes," answered a boy about thirteen years old.

"Where?"

"To Owen's."

"Thank Heaven for that! You walk down towards Owen's without seeming to hurry, but do so. Join your uncle Jim carelessly, and tell him that he is being watched. If there should be a man with him, take double care, but let him know. The detective is a young man dressed in grey. Make haste, my lad, for everything depends upon you now."

The boy sprang away.

As the woman turned to reascend the stairs she saw Gordon standing beside her door. He was deathly white.

"Did you know that man?" he asked, hoarsely.

"No."

"It was the detective."

"I knew it when I saw him watching Jim. Do you think he will return?"

"Undoubtedly, and have the house watched as well, now that he knows what you said about Jim was false."

"What will you do?"

"Heaven knows! It looks like the game is up."

"Up? Why, do you forget—"

"Nothing; but you forget—my wife."

"True. But self-preservation—"

"Foul! Where she remains I shall. There are reasons, Catherine, why I cannot go without her—why *I will not*. I thank you—"

"I beg that you will not, sir. I can never forget what I owe to you. I would go through fire to serve you."

"I know it, and Heaven bless you for it. I am done with the old life, Catherine, and it seems too great a shame, just as I am beginning to live, that I should be like a rat caught in a trap. I hope, however, that I may be able to bear it like a man. Perhaps it is for the best. If anything occurs, let me know."

"You are going—"

"To my wife."

With bent head he walked away. Catherine looked after him curiously.

"A man as might have been an angel if he hadn't started wrong. It was all Alice, curse

her! If I could only have met her—if I ever do meet her—"

The sentence was unfinished, but an observer would have shuddered at the expression of the woman's face. It was gruesome, hideous.

Slowly, sadly, Gordon walked up stairs.

He never left Eden but that he feared to enter her presence again, lest the sweet gentleness of her manner should have once more turned to contempt.

He hesitated, with his hand upon the knob of the door, before entering, but finally summoned courage.

Eden was lying upon a couch near the window, white and still. She turned her great, dark eyes as the door opened, and a faint smile stole over her lips as she recognised Gordon.

"How long you were!" she murmured. He drew a chair beside her and sat down quietly.

"You missed me?" he asked, endeavouring to conceal the eagerness of his tone.

"Yes."

"How good you are to say so!"

"What has happened, Wilfred?"

"Why do you ask?"

"You are pale, distressed. Tell me."

"It is nothing."

"You are deceiving me. Do not. Have I not the right to know?"

Gordon's face flushed deepest crimson. How sweet it was to hear her speak like that! and what an utter coward he had become since he had a prospect of winning her love!

"Oh, Eden, how much the scoundrel you make me feel!" he said, bitterly. "What right have I to force the retribution of misspent years upon you?"

"It is too late to think of that now, Wilfred. Tell me what retribution threatens you now?"

"The danger of arrest."

She tried to raise herself, but fell back, her eyes glowing with excitement.

"There!" he exclaimed, catching her hands and passing his hand across her brow. "See what an utter brute I am to excite you like that!"

"Don't think of me! Wilfred, go and save yourself."

"I cannot. The only safety for me is in your presence. Eden, you must let me stay beside you until the last."

"No—oh, no! I understand it all. You are afraid to trust me; but you need not be. I swear that I shall remain here until you come, or send for me! I will protect the secrets of your life as much as possible. Wilfred, will you go?"

"I cannot. It is not you I fear but others. Eden, suppose—suppose your brother should have considered the matter and—"

"It is too late, I tell you. Do you forget that I am your wife, Wilfred?"

The man groaned.

"I remember that you are mine under compulsion."

"But yours, nevertheless. Poor Wilfred, how you suffer!"

"More than you think! Oh, Heaven, why am I chained to evil!"

"You are not. You must not say it—for my sake! Listen! You think that I despise you, but I do not—indeed I do not. I pity you so tenderly that some day I know I shall forget the past and love you."

"Eden!"

"Take me to some place where you will be safe, dear, until I am well enough to travel; then let us go away anywhere, far from here, where neither of us will remember. Moving me will do less harm than the suspense I should be in concerning you. Promise me!"

"My darling! my darling! It is another link in the chain that holds me. How can I escape from the errors of the past? I am too weak—too weak!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALONE in his own room Wilfred Gordon sat, watching the stars.

The misery of a whole life seemed condensed into those moments, where all the errors of a guilty past passed in phantom procession before him, searing his brow with heavy lines and drawing his handsome mouth into a tenebrae, straight line.

The stars seemed to have grown cold and chilled his soul, instead of sinking there to bring peace and calm.

Conscience was at work! That conscience that is the fire of perdition burning into the soul of the condemned—that conscience that makes us in our finite way understand the infinity of hell.

He saw within his grasp that for which he had longed with a hope that was backed by despair; yet it had turned to gall upon his palate.

He loved Eden recklessly, desperately, with a headlong, mad passion that was like the rapids below the falls. He cared nothing whatever for the danger in which he found himself—that but added ampyrean delights—but he knew that some day she must discover all; he realised that the day must come when she would believe his idolatry had been all a lie, and he shuddered helplessly.

"What am I to do?" he groaned. "Give her up just when happiness is within my hands? How can I—how can I? Yet I know that, as I see her love growing, it will become more bitter to me daily, until I go mad or die. It is retribution—retribution for the hideous errors of my past! I have lost Eden through sin, even as Adam did. But she shall not suffer. I will end it all. Let me test my love, and see how strong it is. To-morrow I will tell her the truth—the truth, that robs me of every joy, every hope; and then—then—"

He arose. Every joint seemed stiffened as with age, and his heart ached with a slow, dull pain, that was torture.

His face was greyish under the starlight, and marked by lines that mortal anguish alone can bring.

He was cold—cold from the stagnation of life blood and the moist misery that weighted him down.

He lifted his haggard eyes and gazed upward.

"Back to the old life!" he muttered, heavily. "Back to sin and despair, and she might have loved me—she might have loved me! What is the use? Life was made for love. No one could worship her so madly as I. Why, therefore, should I give her up for a sentiment? I will not—I will not! I will take her away—away to some tropical country, where she will bloom under my love. She need never know that she should discover, there is always one resource—death. But no! Her life—her sweet, pure young life—would be a wreck—Ab, let me save her from that!"

A violent shudder of abhorrence shook him. Everything that was manly and generous in his nature arose in revolt. He stood pale and half-trembling, then noiselessly he turned and without a sound entered Eden's room.

A fairy lamp, the candle burned nearly to the socket, flickered upon a table, and by the dim light Gordon saw her.

The covers were drawn across her chest; white one hand lay helplessly outside. The long, dark lashes swept her pale cheek with curious contrast. She seemed innocent and pure as a dreaming child.

He drew nearer, his soul in his eyes.

The delicate lids lifted, and the dark eyes looked straight into his own.

"You startled me, Wilfred," she murmured, with a smile. "I was dreaming."

"Of what?"

"A fairy story, I think."

"Of 'Beauty and the Beast'?"

"Perhaps something like it, though I don't think any one could ever call you a beast. Substitute a wicked prince grown good, and you have it nearer."

"Not good, Eden! I wish to Heaven I were, for your sake."

"I cannot forget that you saved my life, Wilfred."

"Nor that I was the cause of the illness that very nearly took it."

"You must not say that."

"I—I have something to tell you, dear."

"Well."

"Not now—to-morrow. Oh, Eden, darling—"

"Hush! It is something about your past,

and I don't wish to know it—indeed I do not. I shall remain with you in future, sharing your danger, of my own free will; but I don't wish to know more than I do already. Shall it be so?"

"No. You tempt me almost beyond human endurance, but I will be as generous as you. To-morrow you shall know all."

"And then?"

"Then I shall say farewell to you for ever."

"Wilfred!"

"It will be by your desire, not otherwise; but you must know—you must! I can see what the end will be. Eden, after to-night you will be removed from me as far as the stars from the earth. I feel as if it were my last night of life, and to-morrow I was going to the scaffold. Eden, will you let me say farewell to you before your toleration is changed again to loathing?"

"That will never be."

"I know better than you. Look at me! Can't you see that my heart is breaking? Can't you see that to-morrow my life will be ended just as effectually as though a bullet had pierced my brain?"

"You frightened me!"

"It is for your good."

"Then, Wilfred, don't do it. I shall be happy in time—I shall indeed."

"Don't! I should go mad while waiting. Eden, will you—will you let me feel your arms about my neck once, that I may have it to remember?"

She lifted her bare arms, from which the sleeves of her night-dress had fallen, and laid them about his neck.

"I wish you would forget the past, as I am endeavouring to do, and live in the future for the future alone, Wilfred," she said, gently.

"My pretty one—my pure one! Every time I look in your eyes I feel myself a criminal, a scoundrel. Oh, Eden, it is so bitterly hard! My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

"Your self-inflicted punishment, Wilfred."

"Every word, every tender, noble word you speak stabs me to the heart afresh. Ah, Eden, Heaven has not quite forgotten me when it can give me a moment filled with such rapture as this. If I could but forget for one short moment, I would be willing to endure for ages after all the punishment that Heaven could send."

"Then forget, Wilfred, for my sake!"

She lifted herself in his arms and laid her lips upon his.

It was such as a child might have bestowed in forgiveness upon a naughty playmate, but the hot blood rushed from Gordon's heart to his head, until his brain reeled under the intoxicating influence.

His arms closed more tightly about her, and the warmth of incalculable love throbbed through his veins with trip hammer force.

"It is the joy of Heaven," he muttered, hoarsely. "Oh, Eden! when to-morrow

comes will you try to think that while I held

you in my arms to night it was as I might

have held my own child? My love, my

love!"

His face was buried for a moment in her

throat, but a loud peal of the door-bell startled him.

He lifted his head and sprang to the door of her chamber.

He seemed intuitively to know what was coming, and waited breathlessly.

It seemed to him hours instead of minutes

before ever-watchful Catherine answered the summons, but the moment the door was

opened he recognised the voice of Brooks, the detective.

"I want to see Wilfred Gordon," he demanded.

"He is not here," the servant answered.

"That is not true. He was seen at the window upstairs an hour ago."

"You are mistaken."

"I have a warrant to search the house. Stand aside, please!"

The paper was flung in the girl's face, and before she could make any resistance whatever, Brooks had entered the hall, closely followed by a policeman, Bertie Staunton and Malcolm Carlton.

Under the gas in the hall Gordon recognised them.

It was as he feared. Every resolution for good was forgotten. He determined to keep Eden at the cost of his life.

He sprang backward into her room and closed the door, slipping a heavy iron bar in place across it, fastened the other door in a similar way, then with a pistol clasped in either hand he waited.

Eden sat up in bed, her eyes brilliant with a burning fire.

"The front room!" exclaimed Brooks, hoarsely, and the noise of hurrying feet was heard.

"Go and leave me!" she gasped. "Think of your own safety! Quick!"

"I cannot!" he whispered, hoarsely. "I prefer death to leaving you. If the worse comes a bullet in my own head will end all."

"Then take me with you to some place of safety. This agony of suspense will kill me!"

"So would moving you."

"No. My wrapper is there. Give it to me."

Lent strength through excitement, Eden slipped from the bed, her nightdress falling in graceful folds.

She threw the wrapper about her, thrust her feet into slippers, and turned again to Gordon, who stood watching her almost stupidly.

"I am ready!" she whispered.

He started violently.

A heavy hand was laid upon the door leading to the front room, and the raucous voice of the policeman came through the thick panels, dully.

"Open the door!"

Gordon did not reply.

For the first time he was beginning to think, and was rapidly revolving a plan in his head. It was filled with greatest danger for both, but in it lay their only hope. Still for her sake he hesitated.

"Open the door, or I shall break it open!"

shouted the detective.

"There is not a moment to lose!"

whispered Eden, all unconscious that upon the other side of that door were love, honour and happiness.

For a brief moment the nobility of Gordon's

nature bubbled again through his selfishness;

but only for a moment. His face was demon-like in its intensity of resolution.

Noisily as a cat springs he reached a small, decorated vase in the room, and threw open the iron door, took from it several instruments, which he thrust into his pockets, then drew out a rope ladder.

At the moment he fastened it securely to the back window ledge a heavy object was

hurled furiously against the door.

Gordon's hand did not even tremble in his work.

(His lips were firmly compressed; every nerve in his body was rigid as steel.)

The door shook violently, but did not yield.

Eden seemed uplifted upon excitement.

Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes brilliant, her limbs firm.

Again a heavy object was brought down with tremendous force upon the door. It split a panel, but the iron bar held it. Then the blows fell thick and fast.

Gordon swung himself over the ledge, went down two rungs and waited, extending his arms to Eden.

She crawled over, and with an arm upon either side of her, to prevent the possibility of a fall, they rapidly descended backward.

The panel of the door gave way.

One blow more and the centre piece fell. Waiting for nothing further, Herbert Stanton sprang over the iron bar and into the room.

An expression of intense disappointment marred the beauty of his features.

"Not here!" he exclaimed huskily. "The room is empty!"

With practised eye the detective glanced about him. He took note of the only remaining door being barred from the inside, and instantly sprang to the window.

There was no sign of life without.

They looked at each other in utter confusion; then the detective unbared the door and ran hastily down the steps to the basement. A tomb-like silence greeted him.

The search continued, but without Malcolm or Bertie. With bowed head the former sat in a chair, abandoning hope.

The latter, however, was looking about him for some evidence of a presence—the recent presence of the woman he loved.

He raised a scarf from a chair. A sweet, subtle odour that he never could forget told him that it was hers. He pressed it to his lips, and for a brief moment was blinded with tears.

He turned away, stifling a weary sigh, and saw upon the table a small bit of paper folded. Mechanically he picked it up and opened it.

"DEAR MRS. BRUCE," he read, "won't you come to me for a little while? I am alone.—EDEN."

Excitedly he thrust the note into Malcolm's hand.

"Mrs. Bruce!" exclaimed Malcolm. "Why it is the name of the man who—"

"There was no need to finish the sentence, for, looking up they saw Mrs. Bruce standing within the door. She wore a wrapper of pale green silk, girdled at the waist with a cord of pink, her hair falling about her shoulders luxuriously.

"Gentlemen, will you explain your presence here?" she exclaimed, haughtily.

"Certainly, madam," answered Herbert, endeavouring to curb his excitement. "You are Mrs. Bruce, are you not?"

"I am."

"We are looking for Wilfred Gordon. Will you have the kindness to tell us where he is?"

"These are his rooms. He was here to-night."

"Will you tell us who wrote that?" asked Malcolm faintly, handing her the scrap of paper.

"Mrs. Gordon. I came up just as she finished it," answered Mrs. Bruce.

"Mrs. Gordon!"

"Yes. Eden—Mr. Gordon's wife. She has been very ill. I don't understand this at all. Where is Mrs. Gordon?"

"That is what we wish to discover," answered Herbert, hoarsely. "Who told you she was Gordon's wife?"

"She did. Her marriage certificate is in that drawer."

With breathless eagerness Herbert tore open the drawer. There upon the top of a supply of writing paper was a dainty, ornamented card. He picked it up. There was no mistake. The name was plain enough—"Eden Carlson." The certificate was signed by a clergyman and witnesses.

Bertie staggered. A terrible giddiness had seized him. His worst imaginings had never pictured that.

The card fell from his hand, and Malcolm picked it up. One glance was enough.

His face assumed a greenish cast that was hideous. His hand closed upon the pretty card, crushing it.

"He shall pay for this with his life!" he hissed.

"Leave him to me!" cried Herbert, his voice firm, steady and frightful in its strained quiet. "Let me repay him, then I shall be ready to die myself. A thousand devils would be less cruel than I. He shall reap as he has sown. Wait!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

A noise in the hall aroused them.

Glancing up they saw the burly policeman holding a man firmly by the collar, his hands handcuffed, and Brooks with another in the same condition.

A short shriek from Mrs. Bruce was drowned by a hoarse, growling oath from one of the men.

"What has he done?" she gasped, pointing to a shrinking wretch before her.

"Why, this 'un was found shovin' the queer yesterday," answered the policeman, indicating the man he held. "He heeled it and escaped, but to-night, while looking for that thief, Gordon, we found these two with a bag full of the queer between 'em, a polishing it off. That 'ere man is one of the worst in the country. He wears a wig, and is known as King Charles. Why, he's famous as a buncle stealer, but it was only a few days ago that it was found out that him and Mr. Bruce is the same."

Pale and erect as a statue, Mrs. Bruce listened, her eyes fixed upon the man before her.

"Hugh!" she exclaimed, sternly, "is that true?"

He did not reply.

She grew a shade pale, but still never wavered.

"There is guilt written upon your face!" she cried, bitterly. "You have deceived me—misery, cruelly deceived me. What have I ever done to you that you should humiliate me like this?"

A curious dogged expression glittered in the man's eyes.

He seemed upon the point of speaking, yet wavered. His hands within the iron cuffs were working spasmodically.

"Oh! Hugh, what have you done?" Mrs. Bruce continued. "I trusted you, and you have repaid me with neglect and disgrace. I might have understood why I was kept a hermit—why neither man nor woman crossed your threshold. It was because you were a thief, and—"

"Silence!" thundered the man, lifting his head with a sudden jerk. "Do you realise what your words are costing me, or don't you care?"

"I don't care! What consideration have you shown me? None! My house has been made the rendezvous for thieves; my wifehood a shame to me!"

He flashed upon her a look that was fiendish.

"Why don't you tell these men that you did not marry me of your own accord, and let me finish the story?" he sneered.

"Hush! I beseech you."

"Oh, you want to prevent the beloved name from being given to the public, do you? Well, you can't."

"Are you mad, Hugh?" cried the other bracelets man.

"No. I simply want these gentlemen to know that I married that woman through revenge. She was engaged to a man who loved her madly. He caused my arrest at one time and very nearly ruined me. I determined to have my revenge, and I did. I went to her with proof of his attachment to a young and lovely girl. My revenge was fully accomplished when I sent him a copy of my marriage certificate."

The palor of Mrs. Bruce's face had deepened until she was ghastly. Her eyes burned, and seemed black as night contrasted with the whiteness of her skin.

"Yes, I trusted you!" she cried, hoarsely, every nerve tense and rigid. "I believed what you said, and what the girl herself said. Tell me, Hugh, and I will forgive you all the rest—tell me that it was not a lie!"

"You are anxious to believe it, then? I regret that I cannot gratify you. The story was untrue. I paid the girl to say what she did."

"Hugh!"

The exclamation was a faint scream, but the brute only laughed scornfully at her misery.

"He didn't die of grief," continued Bruce, mockingly, "as I hoped he would. He was uncomplimentary to you, my dear, in his sudden recovery. At first he drooped and pined, but a fresh face arose on his horizon, and he forgot you. Ha, ha! Ungallant of him, wasn't it?"

"Were all the vile things you told me of false as that?" panted Mrs. Bruce, her hands clasped upon her bosom.

"All—yes. You see, it was easy enough. I can't tell you what a disappointment it was to me when he did not do the heartbroken act and die. I did not care to risk the hemp rope by killing him with my own hand."

"Coward!"

"Yea. It is very kind of you not to put it stronger."

"All the vileness in the language condensed could not express my contempt of you. You think I do not know how to avenge myself? Listen! To-night, when thin voices aroused me, I had just found the proofs of all your crimes. I had not had time to read, but I know where they are, and—"

With a low, hoarse growl, Bruce shook the loosened grip of the detective from his shoulder, and seized the woman by the throat. But for the confinement of his hands he might have killed her before the detective and Stanton together could unclasp the steel-like fingers from her throat.

She staggered back weakly, and Malcolm caught her.

Bruce stood like a demon.

"Did you discover, in your endeavour to find evidence to convict me, that you are not my wife?" he hissed.

Mrs. Bruce was erect in a moment, a dark flush overspreading her cheeks.

"That is false!" she cried, her hands clasped tightly. "You are saying that for some infernal purpose that will destroy me."

"Take your certificate and discover if any such clergyman exists. Find if any entry of it is in the marriage records. Do you think my revenge upon Walter Marchmont was no greater than to make you my legal wife! Bah!"

If he desired revenge upon her, it was full and complete.

She was like a lily, crushed and bruised, that has fallen under a blow from a heavy cane.

Life, joy, hope, were killed with one hideous thrust.

She sat down and dropped her head with a groan.

"Don't despair," Bertie whispered. "If he has lied throughout in other things to you may not he be speaking falsely now? Take heart! Even if it be true, the man or woman who would blame you would not deserve the name. Will you take my hand as that of a sincere friend?"

"Yes, do so," sneered Bruce. "You and his wife will make a magnificent pair to draw to when he finds her."

Stanton turned fiercely, his fist clenched for a tremendous blow, but caught himself in time.

"Your handcuffs protect you!" he exclaimed, densely. "But for them I do not doubt but that I should have killed you."

"Thanks. It may be well to have them

with me all the time. It must be pleasant to have one's wife run away. Why, she was right here in this room, and a second before the policeman entered the room where Chris and I were, Gordon passed through with her in his arms. She was clinging about his neck, and urging him to greater speed."

Bertie flushed duly.

"Why do you not take him away?" demanded Malcolm of the policeman. "Go! We will await your return here."

"Be sure you comfort my wife for her liege lord's absence!" exclaimed Bruce, contemptuously. "By-the-way, Carlton, will you make some explanation for me on 'Change tomorrow? Oh, I forgot! You will be looking for your sister!"

The remainder of his words were stifled by a wrench from the officer that nearly broke his prisoner's neck.

"Good-bye, Hilda!" he cried, as they led him away. "Perhaps you can persuade Marchmont to take you back, as the woman he fell in love with was Staunton's wife. I wish you joy in catching Gordon and his *inamorata*."

The mocking voice was drowned by the opening and closing of the front door. Bruce had passed from his wife's life, but the shadow was of inerasable blackness.

It seemed as though the earth had opened and engulfed Gordon and Eden. There was absolutely no sign of them anywhere, and while every nook and crevice in the house had been searched nothing was discovered.

"I wish there was something that we could do for you," said Malcolm to Mr. Bruce, at parting.

"You are very kind," she replied, dully; "but my life is dead. There is nothing to do now."

"You must not feel so. Many women have been the dupes of scoundrels. No right-minded man would ever censure you for a misfortune."

"You don't understand," she cried, bitterly. "I set myself up as a judge. I would even condone no explanation, but wrote Marchmont a cold, cruel letter, that must have made him despise me. I know now, when it is too late, that I loved him always, and that the bitterness in my heart was not hatred, but a love wounded, but immortal."

"And he loved you?"

"Not to believe that would destroy every memory even of sweetness that ever sunned my existence. It will be a remembrance upon which I shall live."

"If he ever loved he will forgive all!" cried Bertie, huskily.

"Do you think I could ask it—I, who have so sinned against him? Could I ask him to receive an outcast into his home and heart? Never! You are very good, both of you, but the greatest kindness you can show me is to leave me alone with my sorrow, with the wreck of my life."

And they went. It was no time to offer either sympathy or condolence, and they knew it. They left her there in Eden's room, closing the door upon her.

The candle in the fairy-lamp flared up with a loud splutter and went out, leaving her in darkness; but she did not seem conscious of it. She was alone with her dead—Hope and Happiness!

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHEN Gordon reached the ground below the window, a light, nervous hand was laid upon his arm. By the light of the stars he recognized Catherine.

"Come this way," she whispered.

Unquestioningly he followed, holding Eden closely, and protecting her strength as much as possible.

Through an improvised gate in the rear fence Catherine led him, and he found himself in the yard leading into the next street. A woman emerged from the shadow of the house and stealthily approached Catherine.

"The carriage is ready," she whispered. "Jim will drive. You'd better hurry."

Catherine nodded, and led Gordon and Eden noiselessly through the basement hall to the front gate, which stood ready opened.

She pointed silently, and through it Gordon vanished, while Catherine and her friend watched from a side window.

The carriage door was closed quietly and the vehicle driven away quickly, the clash of the horses' feet upon the cobblestones sounding like the clash of artillery in the silence of the night.

"Where are we going?" asked Eden, when she had recovered her breath.

"I don't know," he answered, drawing her closer to him for warmth, and wrapping the lap-robe about her. "I am trusting to Jim. We are safe enough now."

"You are quite sure?"

"Certain! Eden, why were you so much interested in my fate? Why did you not remain where you were, and let me take the consequences of my sin?"

"I could not. Could I so soon forget what you have done for me? Ah, Wilfred, there is much to be forgiven him who loves not wisely but too well. I am going to abandon myself to the one thought of loving you and forgetting your faults."

"Eden, my own! My gratitude, my great love makes me tongue-tied. I can say nothing—nothing. Heart and soul seem bursting. All repentance even is swallowed up in my mad worship of you, my soul's idol."

She smiled, put up her hand, and laid her palm upon his cheek.

"I believe you," she whispered.

He shivered.

"Suppose," he said, hoarsely, "that had been your brother—and Bertie Staunton searching for you to-night. Would you have gone with Eden?"

She hesitated a moment.

"Why do you ask me that?" she asked, painfully strangling a sob. "You know how impossible that is."

"But suppose it were true—suppose I had deceived you—what then, Eden?"

"If you deceived me now I should despise you."

He pretended to be arranging the lap-robe that she might not discover how he trembled. His whole nature seemed shaken at her answer. She would love him some time. He felt it, he knew it. He had risked so much that he would go on now to the death.

(To be continued.)

FIRES UNSEEN.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

On the morning following the ball, when the rest of the household assembled at breakfast, Romola did not appear.

"She does not dare to meet me," said Churchill to himself; and then Mrs. Alingham remarked aloud,

"Romola will not come down. The child is unaccustomed to so much excitement. She was very white when she came in last night, and I told her maid not to call her."

The breakfast dragged through, little being eaten and less said. Mrs. Alingham's face was whiter and more haggard than usual. She had received a letter from the family lawyer, saying that Valentine Eyre and his wife would return to England within the next fortnight, and desiring her, Mrs. Alingham, to be at Chevenage Court with Romola to welcome home the new-comers.

In the midst of her own overwhelming grief and anxiety Mrs. Alingham did not see that Churchill Penance looked and spoke with the air of a man who had received some terrible blow; and when breakfast was over she took

him aside and placed the lawyer's letter in his hands.

"You will remember your promise now?" she said, anxiously. "You will not desert us in this hour, for I have a premonition of coming evil, and—and you are my only friend!"

"What evil do you fear, Mrs. Alingham?" asked Churchill, in an absent tone.

"I do not know," she replied, tactfully. "All is vague to me, but one thing is certain. I shall be sent away from the children, and then Heaven knows how they may be wronged."

"Mrs. Alingham," said Churchill, gravely and firmly, "I must break that promise which I made to you. I cannot remain here to meet Valentine Eyre, or marry his daughter. I can give you no explanation of this change, except this, that I now see it cannot be. I meditated a sin which Heaven will not permit."

For a few moments Mrs. Alingham was speechless with grief and anger. She thought Churchill Penance was a false, weak man, who had lightly forsaken himself. For what wrong could her darling, her pure Romola have done to bring this woful change about?

"Do you think that, however bad Valentine Eyre may have been, that his innocent child is unworthy of you?"

"That is beside the question," replied Churchill, haughtily. Then, as his face grew deathly pale, he added, in a broken tone, "But I will tell you this, Mrs. Alingham. Romola never loved me, and we are better apart."

"You are mistaken," cried the woman, piteously.

"I was mistaken. I am not now," replied Churchill, in the same cold, firm tones. "True," he added, "Romola told me she loved me, but it was only a childish fancy, and we are better apart."

"Then you will not stay?"

"I cannot stay. Please do not press me any more on this subject. You have been very kind to me, Mrs. Alingham, and in any other way I would gladly serve you. But this is impossible."

"You will not leave at once?" asked Mrs. Alingham, who cherished a wild hope that this might be some foolish lover's quarrel which would be made up before the sun set.

"I do not know," replied Churchill, who had an idea of going away without saying good-bye to anyone, and leaving his things to follow him. "My plans are vague and uncertain," he continued. "But I see my mother approaching. Pray do not say a word of this to her," and then Churchill turned away and went out-of-doors into the glorious sunshine, which seemed to mock the sick heart which he carried in his bosom.

He lit a cigar and smoked it as he strolled through the park. And anyone meeting him would have suspected nothing, for except that it was white and rigid, his face bore no trace of the storm of grief and shame which had convulsed it a few short hours ago, until he came to a certain spot in the park; and here he turned away, and his hands went up for a moment to his face.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "How long it takes a man to learn everything! But I think I know my last lesson, and yet I can scarcely dare to believe it" he thought, bitterly. "I could have sworn to her love for me, and her perfect truth. And unless she was hardened in deceit, and that this man was in England while people thought he was abroad, what time, what opportunity could she have had for the meetings of which I heard them speak last night?"

Until this moment Churchill's brain had been too stunned for one clear thought. But now, as he stood there on the spot where he had a few weeks ago told his love, he suddenly remembered that the change in Romola's manner had begun from the day which he read in the newspapers of his kinsman's return.

He recalled the fact of Romola's early walk

in the park, her agitation in the hall, her pale looks, and loss of appetite at breakfast. The very words she had uttered afterwards came back to him, and all seemed clear as daylight. To his disturbed, jealous mind, this was the only conclusion to be drawn from the whole thing.

That at some time or other in her life Romola had entered into some clandestine love affair with Egerton St. George, most likely not dreaming of who or what he was; and then, on his return as Marquis of Eastshire, the two had arranged a meeting which had taken place in the early morning at Lockesley Hall.

"I should soon, no doubt, have received my dismissal," thought Churchill, who had forgotten all Romola's love and tenderness to him. He only remembered her changed manner within the last few weeks, and how she had trembled in the ball-room when the Marquis had come up. He remembered, too, his former bad experiences of women; and, bringing them all to weigh in the balance against poor Romola, he went on his way to the nearest country station, where he took a ticket for Charing Cross, London, with every intention of quitting England for the rest of his life. To Romola he was determined he would not write one line, but he would write to his mother, bidding her farewell for a short time, and telling her that the fever of travel had seized him again.

He carried out his intention of writing to his mother; but by the time the letter arrived at Lockesley Hall, Romola was struggling in the grasp of a brain fever, from which there seemed scarcely a hope that she would recover.

Mrs. Alingham never left her darling's side night or day; and Mrs. Penance forgave the girl, when she saw her lying now like a storm-beaten flower, all white and still, upon her bed, now struggling so fiercely that it took more than one pair of strong arms to hold her down, and crying piteously that Churchill had never loved her, he had taken her heart and broken it for pastime. He had never told her that he loved her, or asked her to be his wife; but he had cruelly, for sport, or pure malignity, wrung the confession of her love from her, for in the dreadful hours which followed their return from the ball this was the one bitter conclusion to which poor Romola had been able to come. It broke her heart to think her lover was false, for she loved him as fondly and truly as ever. But she had nothing else to think of, for it never entered her head that Churchill had overheard and misunderstood her conversation with the Marquis.

If she had known, and Churchill and she had met once more, all would have been well; for, angry as he was, the lover must have believed the words as they would have come from Romola's lips, even against the hearing of his own ears.

The news of Romola's illness travelled swiftly to Stainslaugh Castle, where the Marquis was staying, and every day a horse and rider was to be seen at the entrance-gate of Lockesley Hall; and the lodge-keeper reaped a golden harvest for her daily report and unvarying regrets that sweet Miss Romola was no better.

Sometimes the Marquis would ride twice in the day to Lockesley Hall, and there were times when he roused up the lodge-keeper's wife at midnight; but at no hour would he ride up to the house, lest the sound of his horse's feet on the gravel should disturb the sick girl, who, alas! was unconscious of all but the wild fancies of her own fevered brain.

Before the ball, of which she had been the belle, Romola's illness might have come and passed without notice from the outer world; but now it caused universal consternation and even grief, for many had fallen in love at first sight with the beautiful girl. They could not understand why she had so suddenly been stricken. But nowhere did the illness cause greater excitement than at Stainslaugh Castle. The Duchess was really disconcerted, for she

had not only conceived something of an affection for the girl, but she was determined to take up one whose social success was already assured.

At first, except to Ethel, who held the key-note, all was vague surmise and conjecture as to the cause of the illness. But when it became known that Churchill Penance had taken a sudden departure from Lockesley Hall the mystery was solved, and conclusions were speedily come to, deductions drawn, and comments freely made. Then Churchill's old sins were brought up against him; and the Duchess, who felt really sorry for Romola, lost no opportunity of denouncing Churchill Penance in terms which the Marquis translated into such plain words as unmilitated scoundrel, and many stronger epithets.

He exclaimed, one day, in a fiercer outbreak of indignation than usual, that he would set out and not rest until he had unearthed Churchill Penance from his cowardly hiding-place, and given him the punishment he deserved; when, under pretence of defending the absent, and therefore earning for herself the reputation of being generous, Ethel Drod took this opportunity to cast another stone at her rival.

"You talk said she, smirkingly to the Marquis, "as if you were a knight of old, whose mission it was to ride abroad redressing human wrongs; and, of course, it is very noble and admirable of you; but in this instance your chivalry is a little mistaken. I cannot but say that Mr. Penance did quite right."

"Did right!" exclaimed the Marquis, hotly, "to engage himself to a young innocent girl and then leave her without any excuse? Oh! Miss Drod! if Miss Romola De Nunaz were not as pure and beautiful as the dawn I would still wonder at you."

Ethel was taken aback for a moment, the speaker was so evidently in earnest; but she persevered in her charge, and, resuming her sneering manner, said with a meaning look,—

"I do not think it was either pure or beautiful in Miss De Nunaz to be engaged to one man and carrying on an intrigue at the same time with another; but if all accounts are true, Mr. Penance might have known better than to trust a Spaniard!"

"What do you mean, Miss Drod?" exclaimed the Marquis, furiously, forgetting, in his indignation, the respect which was due to his hearer as a woman and then with livid face he went on. "How dare you speak of an intrigue in connection with Miss De Nunaz?"

"I am making him smart," thought Ethel, as she saw the flaming eyes and quivering lips before her; then, smiling a slow languid of much meaning, she drooped her lids, which was a way with her when she very much wished to provoke anybody; and, having preserved an irritating silence for a few moments, she said, haughtily,—

"You forgot yourself very much indeed. However, I suppose I ought to have substituted that objectionable word with the milder term of love affair; but I like to call things by their proper names, and you know as well as I do that Romola De Nunaz behaved shamefully to Churchill Penance."

"I know nothing of the kind," retorted the Marquis, who was almost too astonished for words.

"How brazen he is!" thought Ethel; but aloud she said, scornfully,—

"No doubt you saw nothing shameful in her conduct; but I think she showed herself utterly false and unscrupulous when she allowed you to be introduced to her as a stranger when, by her own confession, which Mr. Penance and I accidentally overheard, she had been meeting you as a lover!"

"Damnation!"

The one word broke like a pistol shot from the Marquis's lips; and when the echoes of it ceased no other word or sound broke the silence, which was of that heavy, deathly kind which makes one fear to look lest a sword should be seen descending. A nervous terror of her companion seized Ethel. She

looked at his stricken face and starting eyes, and her guilty conscience made her fear that he would do her some terrible injury. She longed to scream out or move, but felt powerless to do so, and the longer she looked at the Marquis's face the more fixed hers became. She felt convinced that he was subjecting her to some sort of mesmerism, that he might be able to wreak full vengeance on her; but, in truth, the Marquis neither saw nor heeded her. All his thoughts were with the unhappy, beautiful girl whom he had so unwittingly ruined.

"Oh, Heaven!" he exclaimed at last, and hot, bitter tears broke from his eyes, and ran down his face, until even Ethel could have cried for pity of him. "Oh, Heaven!" he repeated, "what have I done? How shall I undo it? I saw her once by accident. I swear it! It was almost the first morning of my return to England. I had wandered close to the park at Lockesley Hall, and got bitten by a dog. She came by and bound up my hand. She looked and spoke like an angel, and I felt purified by her very presence.

"I feared the dog who had bitten me was mad, though I would not frighten her by saying so; and, trembling for her safety, I entreated that she would allow me to see her through the Park. She consented after some protest against the trouble for me, and I walked with her side until we came in sight of the house.

"Then," continued the Marquis with a piteous break in his voice, "she thanked me and held out her hand, and, in a moment of madness, I dared to raise it to my lips!—I who was not worthy to breathe the air with her. And, angry with me for my presumption, and yet too kind to show her anger by more than a look, too innocent to think that there was evil in my act, she hurried away without another word, and I never saw her again until the night of the ball, when, not knowing that she was engaged, I sought her to beg pardon for my presumption. Oh, Miss Drod!" here the Marquis sank down and hid his face in his hands, "I have heard that men's sins always find them out, but until I saw Romola I did not believe it. I have spent a sinful life, and this is my punishment; but there is no justice in Heaven if the innocent one is allowed to suffer for me!"

The two remained silent and motionless after this, until, suddenly, Ethel Drod rose and came to her companion's side.

"Marquis," she said, "you blame yourself too much. It will all come right; for if it is true that sin is always punished, it must be equally true that innocence never fails to triumph; but I am very sorry for you," she went on with emotion, "and for Romola too! If I had dreamed of the truth, I would have done all I could to prevent Mr. Penance from going away!"

"You might have pleaded with him, even in your ignorance," cried the Marquis, stung to fresh anger, and Ethel made no reply.

For the first time in her life she began to see what unlovely companions and false friends selfishness and treachery were, and in her heart she was utterly ashamed of herself.

But the Marquis did not remain long inactive. His first thought was to seek for Churchill Penance and explain all. And hoping to find some clue to the absent lover, he set out at once for Lockesley Hall, spurring his horse along the road in a way that the poor animal could never have forgotten.

On arriving at his destination the Marquis heard two pieces of news, one of which almost caused him to fall from his saddle for excess of joy. This was, that the crisis in the fever was passed; and after several hours of calm, natural sleep, Romola, though almost lifeless, had been pronounced out of danger; but the second piece of news was very disappointing.

The Marquis learned from the man who had opened the door that Mrs. Penance had

gone away, and an impious telegram had that morning summoned Mrs. Alingham to Chevenage Court; and as no one at Locksley Hall could put him on the right track for Mrs. Penance or her son, the Marquis thought that nothing remained for him but to follow Mrs. Alingham. But before setting out once more the Marquis begged to see Romola's nurse, and this personage was instructed without loss of time to cheer her patient with these words :

" Mr. Penance loves you still, and he is not to blame for what happened ! Now you must be a good child, and get well to meet your lover ! For one who would do anything for you is gone to bring him back ! "

And when Romola heard these words she thought her fevered dreams had come back again ; but still they made her very happy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE had been no excitement at the " Hotel Madelina " in Florence, where, one day, twelve years ago, it was discovered that in one of the rooms a man lay wounded to death.

Churchill Penance would not have wondered at the little notice which the noise of his revolver attracted if he could have witnessed the scene which took place at the hotel while he was flying from Florence.

The keeper of the hotel crept upstairs and softly entered the room, which he had good reason to hope was the chamber of death, because dead men tell no tales ; and the worthy Giacomo feared unpleasant results for himself should the Englishman recover and seek an interview with the Countess Czarvas, for Giacomo was in the uncomfortable position of one who stands between two fires, and knows it is a choice between one and the other.

This honest landlord was in the pay of two persons, who were each trying to outwit the other.

The Englishman, who called himself Valentine Eyre, had arranged with Giacomo that he, Valentine Eyre, was to be allowed to shoot his enemy there that day without interruption, and afterwards the body was to be disposed of in the best manner possible.

Giacomo had faithfully agreed to all this. The Englishman need not fear. A bad epidemic should at once break out in his hotel, and guests and servants alike would fly for their lives.

Of course it would be a loss, but Monsieur's ready money and his promises were supposed to make it good.

And then Giacomo had gone to the Countess Czarvas, who also had made arrangements with the honest landlord, by means of a handsome sum and generous promises, that an Englishman should be allowed to arrive at the " Hotel Madelina " at a certain hour, and pass up the stairs unquestioned, and having shot the man who called himself Valentine Eyre, should be assisted to make his escape with all possible speed.

Perhaps the Countess had her own further arrangements for the reward of the assassin, as she had no doubt Churchill Penance would be, but she did not confide them to Giacomo, nor did that trusty villain seek to know more than he was told.

Valentine Eyre had paid him well, but the Countess had paid him better, and made the most generous promises, and so Giacomo determined to serve her.

Therefore, while Churchill Penance, an assassin in all but the actual deed, was flying from Florence to remorse and fear, Giacomo bent over the victim and discovered that he was only badly wounded, not dead.

The landlord might, however, have contrived that the wound should be mortal but for a timely occurrence, which was, no doubt, the interposition of Providence, that spared Hermann Eyre for a chance of better things.

The Italian was interrupted in his villainous task of rifling his victim's pockets, and

then a blow from behind stayed his murderer's hand.

The arm which had felled the ruffian was that of Valentine Eyre's faithful servant, who had kept his vow of not leaving Rio San Vozz until he should discover what had become of his master.

He had waited in vain for several weeks, then Hermann appeared as Valentine Eyre with a trumped-up tale to account for his absence, and with all his shrewdness the servant was completely deceived by the extraordinary resemblance between the two brothers.

With Martin suspecting nothing and faithful to the death, it was all plain sailing with Hermann, who, within a short time knew every detail of Valentine's past life, and much of Zitella's.

There was only one subject on which the two were not confiding, and that was Churchill Penance, for whom Martin entertained an affection which not even loyalty to his master could shake ; but Hermann was careful not to let the servant suspect that for that encounter in the market-place he owed Churchill Penance a deadly grudge, which he would not rest until he had fully paid.

Together Hermann and Martin had gone on the track of Zitella, and here the servant proved a valuable ally, for he was well versed in the ways of foreign lands, and could speak as much of their languages and as many as were necessary with surprising skill, a fact which prevented him from finding out the fraud of which he was the victim, for Hermann talked with his servant in Spanish or English alone, and left him all the business arrangements as they went along.

Valence's untiring energy in the search was further accentuated by his hatred for Zitella. He considered her his master's evil angel, and would have rejoiced could he see her put to death for her sins.

And Hermann was careful to conceal the fact that his object was not the destruction of this beautiful, wicked woman, for, in spite of her crimes and her heartless falsehoods, he loved her as madly as when they had been betrothed among the forests in Castile, and he was more savagely determined than ever to make her his wife.

At last, in Florence, they had unearthed Zitella. Had she dreamed of Martin's pursuit another name than Czarvas would have been hers ; but it was unknown to Hermann. That was all she cared for, as she thought there was now nothing more to be feared from Valentine Eyre.

But at the name of the Countess Czarvas Martin had pricked his ears like a war-horse, And having reached his quarry at last, Hermann debated on the surest way of making it his own ; but his first step was to assure the servant that there must be no open attack on the Countess. He had a deadlier means of punishment, he said, and Martin must leave all to him.

So, when Hermann lay on the floor in the hotel done almost to death, as Martin believed, by the machinations of that shameless adventuress, as he called Zitella, the faithful servant remembered his master's injunctions, and resolved to make no move until his master was well again ; but he blessed himself inwardly when he remembered that if he had not suspected something and hidden in the hotel he would have been at that moment on his way to Rome, whither Hermann had despatched him to buy some pictures.

Not leaving his master's side for the space of time in which one draws a breath Martin sent for a doctor, whose skill and discretion he could trust, and between them Hermann was restored to life, and complimented the servant on his wisdom and fidelity. But soon after the story of the Countess Czarvas's infamy had been mysteriously spread through Florence Hermann found business for his faithful servant in a distant land, and when Martin had returned to Florence from the

frivolous mission on which he had been sent, there was no trace of either Hermann or Zitella to be found, and though he made careful inquiries he could hear nothing of them.

The Hotel Madelina had also passed into other hands than those of the respectable Giacomo who had effaced himself somehow.

It was then that a fatal suspicion of fraud first began to disturb the mind of Martin ; but for a long time it remained but a mere suspicion, and one for which he could give no reason.

It grew stronger, however, as months passed by—so strong that he wrote home to England for news of his master ; but Valentine Eyre had not been heard of at Chevenage Court. And when this reply reached him, though he knew not why it should be so, the smouldering fires of Martin's fears and suspicions broke into a flame, and by his own faithful soul he swore that he would never again set foot on English soil until he had found his master.

By some strange force of attraction Martin was impelled to Rio San Vozz.

It was Hermann, who, not loudly or openly, but with cautious whispers and well-planted stings, had made the Countess Czarvas infamous in the sight of once adoring Florence, and what he had worked for and waited for had come at last.

Zitella, reviled and scorned by yesterday's slaves, had bowed to necessity, and turned as a last resource to the man who had ruined her, and whom she hated with deadly hatred, and Hermann's triumph was complete.

He had wanted no revenge, but to win her, and having won her he cared not for her hate. Perhaps his fierce, wild nature made him love her all the more for the knowledge that she was an eagle taken by guile in a fowler's net.

So they had left Florence, and wandered like Arabs over the face of the world until, after twelve years, Zitella was seized by a sudden desire to revisit England. And now they were at Chevenage Court, welcomed and honoured, outwardly at least, as the rightful master and mistress by all the servants, and suspected by none.

The long-neglected tenantry were glad to know that the lord of the soil on which they lived was amongst them once more ; for, though thoughtless, they remembered the heir as a young man, kind-hearted and generous, and now, if not greatly changed, he would, they thought, give ear to their grievances ; but they were afraid to hope for too much, for, as they said, Valentine Eyre was a rover born, and most likely he would be off again by the end of a month.

A prophecy which was likely to be fulfilled, for Mrs. Eyre was not favourably disposed to the English, and for the first two or three days she grumbled incessantly at everything in or about the house of Chevenage Court, in which many a fair and high-bred woman had been proud to reign as mistress and queen.

The grey skies outside, the gloomy rooms within, devoid of all brilliant colour and light ; the sombre hangings of faded crimson, the ghostly passages and galleries of dead and gone Eyres.

" Bah ! They gave her the shudders ! " cried Zitella, peevishly.

" It was like being in a vault. Let her go back to her birth-land—her sunny Spain, or to Italy. She must go at once. She would have the doles were she to remain here."

So the cry went on, until Hermann was wearied, and as a vent for his feelings became furiously angry with Mrs. Alingham for disregarding the orders which she had received from the family lawyer, and so a telegram was despatched, summoning the governess to Chevenage Court.

It was an event for which Mrs. Alingham must have been prepared. Yet what agonies she underwent when the message reached her

Heaven only knew; but Romola was out of danger, and so there was no sufficient excuse for disregarding the telegram, and Mrs. Alingham went like a martyr to the stake, feeling the fire already in her soul.

It was late in the afternoon when Mrs. Alingham entered Chevenage Court, and looked on the face of its master; and in that look her heart told her that something beyond all the evil she had ever dreaded or dreamed of was about to come to pass.

She did not know then why there was no agonised rushing out of her innermost being—why no cry struggled for utterance in the sight of the man who had been her one thought, her one prayer, through nineteen long years. All the way to Chevenage Court this had been the cry of her heart:

The children are dear, but he is dearer!

And now that she stood in his presence, her words were reversed. She looked without pain at him, without shame at the insolent woman who sat in her rightful place, and did not rise to greet her.

"Mrs. Alingham," said Hermann, and the other bowed. "I expected to see you here with your charge on our arrival," he went on, in tones that were meant to convey to the hearer a sense of his superiority. "Did you not receive my instructions through the family lawyer?"

Mrs. Alingham's lips tightened as she made reply.

"I certainly received your instructions, Mr. Eyre, but I could not leave my charge—your child—to die!"

Mrs. Alingham was stung into the last few words; but when they were uttered she shrank and trembled as if she expected them to recoil on herself.

"Pray be seated, Mrs. Alingham," said Hermann. "You must be weary; and, meanwhile, I have some explanations to make."

Mrs. Alingham's heart sickened within her. She looked from the man for whom she had sacrificed all but life to the woman who had usurped her place, and said within herself, "Now the final blow is about to fall. I am going to be dismissed;" but with outward calm she took the chair assigned to her, and waited until Hermann chose to speak.

"Mrs. Alingham," he began at last, "you spoke just now of my daughter?"

"Yes, your daughter," she interrupted in a breathless manner, "the child whom you have not cared to see—to whom you have written no line, sent no loving message, for the last seventeen years."

Mrs. Alingham paused; her wrath had spent itself. She began to be afraid, and drooped her head.

"I see," Hermann went on, in a peculiarly soft tone, "that what I have heard through the lawyer is perfectly true. You are devoted to these children. You shall be rewarded, Mrs. Alingham; but you are mistaken when you speak of them as my children. They are not mine!"

"Not yours!" interrupted Mrs. Alingham, rising in her chair and clutching her right hand convulsively. "Not yours! Oh! villain!"

Suddenly her voice died. She sank back once more in the chair from which she had sprung, and, but for the trembling of her form and the convulsive working of her clenched fingers, she might have been a stone.

"Do I understand you to call me a villain?" asked Hermann, with a sort of suave surprise.

"It is a mild name for one who denies his fatherhood, was the faint reply."

"I forgive you, Mrs. Alingham," Hermann went on, with the air of one who feels almost moved by his own generosity, because I admire your faith and devotion so much. But as I have said before, you are mistaken, and when you have heard all you will think very differently. I would have told you," he continued, "when you interrupted me that these children are not mine, but the children of Hermann, a son of Vivian Eyre, my father, and Zenon, a gipsy!"

"He denies his own children," thought Mrs. Alingham; and then a cry broke from her lips; but Hermann checked it as it rose, holding up his hand.

"Do not," he said, "interrupt me again until I have finished, for since you have had the charge of these children so long it is due to you that all should be explained. You know that my name is Valentine Eyre—that my first wife was my cousin, a Castilian, named Celia De Nanz, I married her by my uncle's wish—and indeed my own—at his dying bed. For some time we were happy, and then, by an accident, I discovered that my wife was false to me." Here there was a moment's pause, but Mrs. Alingham controlled herself, and the narrative went on,

"My wife was false to me," repeated Hermann, and I knew it, but there was no fierce, violent quarrel between us. I simply told her that a stagnant life did not suit me, and I was determined to leave her home and travel until the restless fit should have passed off; but I assured her that there was to be no sacrifice of her own comfort. She could accompany me or not, as she wished. She chose to remain at home, and we parted with every outward appearance of affection. I spent a few months in aimless wandering, and then came to me the news that I was the father of twins, a boy and a girl—a piece of intelligence which, with my secret knowledge of Celia, could bring me but little pleasure or triumph. But I did not for a moment doubt that the children were really mine; but, strange to say, I never felt drawn to them in the smallest way. I blamed myself for my want of parental affection, and excused it in the same breath by my wife's falsehood. I cared not to see my children or hear their names, and when another year or so made me a widower I arranged, as you know, that they should go to England. But before they started I forced myself to see and bid them farewell, and then I learned that my wife had not only been false, but cruel. The children shrank away from me as one whom they had been taught to hate; and the boy screamed when I touched him, saying in baby language that I had killed his mother!"

Mrs. Alingham shuddered, and a faint moan broke from her lips. Hermann had paused to congratulate himself on the fact that he had been to Canada and remembered this incident as one of many recorded by a garrulous old woman, who had been allowed to rail at him with impunity for his shameful neglect of the sweet young lady whom she herself had nursed. Presently he went on,

"Twelve years ago, Mrs. Alingham, I learned from the confession of my natural brother Hermann how I had been duped and wronged. I had been but a husband in name only, and Hermann, this gipsy brother, was the father of the children who were supposed to be mine. I understood then some of the hatred which had induced my wife to pray that the children should not bear my name; but at Florence, twelve years ago, the partner of Celia's guilt met with his just reward; for as he had taken advantage of my absence in a far-off land to assume my identity, he received the bullet which my rival, Churchill Penance, intended for me."

"Churchill Penance," gasped Mrs. Alingham, echoing the name through white lips.

"Yes," rejoined Hermann, looking at her keenly. "An Englishman, and once my friend; but as he coveted what I loved, and had won, he thought himself wronged, and felt justified in shooting me. That he did not succeed was due only to the fact of my brother's fraud, for that shot was fatal at the close of a few hours, which enabled Hermann to make the confession he left with Martin, a servant of mine, who had been imposed upon to the last, because of the likeness between me and my brother. Martin had served Hermann for some two years, and never found him out. But you seem very much agitated, Mrs. Alingham! Do you happen

to know anything of this young Englishman, Churchill Penance?"

Mrs. Alingham was slow to answer. She felt involved in a net of treachery and falsehood. She must take time to think, and reflect before she uttered words which might ruin the children for whom she was ever resolved to fight; but at last she said, falteringly—

"Yes. I know Mr. Penance. He has a claim on your gratitude," she added quickly, "as well as on mine, since he once saved Juan's life."

"For that I have little to be thankful for," replied Hermann, with a bitter look. "You seem to forget that this boy and girl are living witnesses of my wife's falsehood, and my dishonour. It would be better, both for me and for themselves, that they were dead!"

During all this interview Zitella never once moved or spoke, and it seemed as if her husband had forgotten her presence.

But Mrs. Alingham was never more painfully conscious than in this moment that the great black eyes of the Spaniard had been fixed on her from first to last with innocent triumph; but now returning their glances with a scorn and contempt beyond all words, she instantly rose from her chair, and turning to Hermann, began the war.

"Yes," she cried passionately. "You wish your son, your lawful son, to be dead, that this woman," pointing with a fierce gesture towards Zitella, "may be gratified—this woman that you love as you never loved your true wife! You would have her child, perhaps, stand in the place of your rightful son!"

"Mrs. Alingham, these are strange words," said Hermann, when for one moment the harrying storm had subsided. "Words," he continued coldly, "which fully justify me in telling you that your service to me is at an end."

Mrs. Alingham sank back as if she had received a blow. It was more than ever a matter of life and death to her now that she should be allowed to remain with Romola. She had looked for oppressive slights, injustice, from Valentine Eyre's second wife to Valentine's child; but she had not dreamt that the man she had loved and respected through all could become so false and unscrupulous as to disown his own children.

"Let me stay with them, let me have time to think and plan," was her thought. "Or, I must stay at any price, at any cost," and then on the impulse of the moment she said aloud,

"You must forgive me if I have spoken passionately, but my heart is torn asunder, for I love these children as if they were my own. Not only have I cared them for seventeen years, but I was their mother's best friend!"

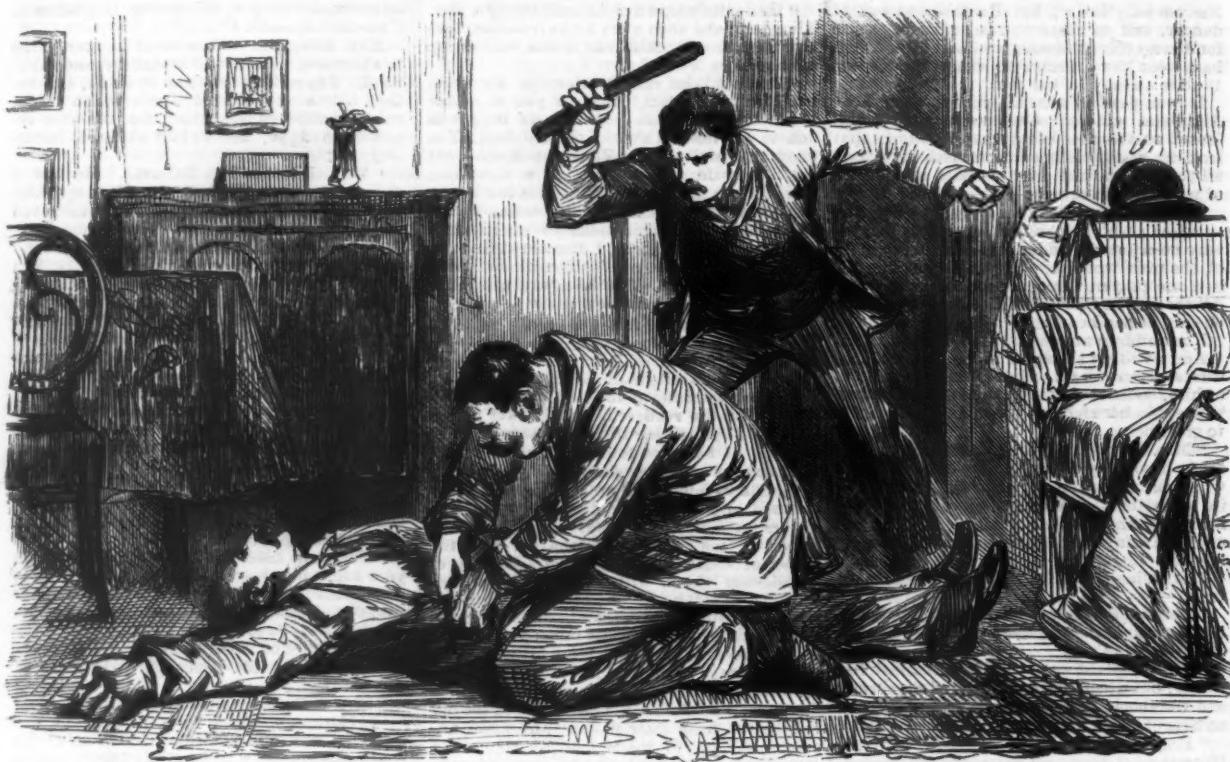
"That does not speak well for you!" said Zitella, rudely speaking for the first time. But ignoring her remark with a scorn which was supreme, Mrs. Alingham continued to address herself to Hermann.

"I was their mother's friend," she repeated, "and I could have sworn to their mother's innocence. You must," and she clasped her hands interestingly, "give me some good proof of your story before I can believe you!"

Hermann was prepared for this. He produced a paper, on which the supposed confession of Hermann Eyre was written.

Mrs. Alingham took it up thoughtfully, and professed to read the written lines carefully, while all the time she was striving to think calmly, and plan out some course of action, for fight for her children she would, even though it must be against her husband. But she would not allow herself again to forget that she was a defenceless woman, and her tactics must be those of strategem.

So when she came to the signature of Valentine at the end of the paper she dropped it in her lap with a groan, an of conviction and despair. In reality, it came from



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overwhelming grief and shame in the thought that Valentine Eyre should be such an utter villain, but never more should he dwell in her memory as husband or lover.

As he disowned his children, so her heart would disown his fatherhood. He was no longer her husband, or the father of her children, but her bitter enemy and theirs, to be fought against and foiled with his own foul weapons of deceit and treachery.

"You acknowledge now that my story is true?" said Hermann, as the paper fell into Mrs. Alingham's lap, and her hands went up to her face with a gesture of despair.

"I do!" she replied, through her clasped hands. "Heaven help me, I do! I am ashamed now that ever I called Celia De Nuns' friend!" And then she kept silence, praying dear Heaven to forgive her the lie which, in her sore distress, she was driven to tell.

"You see now that I might have been less generous," went on Hermann. "For twelve years I have allowed the children of my false brother, and false wife, to dwell in honour and luxury at my expense. No other man in the world, who had been treated as I have been treated, would have done that!"

"But now your clemency will be at an end," hazarded Mrs. Alingham, fearfully. "You will give these children away before the world as the offspring of crime and shame!"

"I must consider my name," replied Hermann, coldly; "and so there will be no public scandal; but I have not yet decided what to do. I need not," he added, "tell you that all this is in strict confidence."

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"I loved a woman whom I believed to be good and pure," replied Mrs. Alingham. But Hermann let the remark pass by.

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Hermann sprang to his feet like a shot. "You allowed this?" he cried, in a fury. "You dared to allow this?"

"I did not know of it," was the calm reply, "until a week ago. Romola was but a child to me then. I learned the truth from the young man's lips. But why," she added, eagerly, "should he not have her, seeing the stigma that is attached to her birth?"

"I will not have it!" thundered Hermann, with a fierce oath. "This man is the murderer of my brother, and I will denounce him as such, if he is at Lockesley Hall now!"

"He has left it for ever," replied Mrs. Alingham, quietly. "No doubt the mention of your name was the cause of his departure."

"I am weary of this," broke in Zitella, suddenly. "I will find something more congenial, if, indeed, there is anything congenial in this dismal place;" and, casting an insolent glance at Mrs. Alingham, she rose and crossed the room, sweeping the floor with her rich train of yellow silk. "Valentine," she said, looking back from the door at her husband, "when you have confided all your disgraceful family stories to that person, you may come and amuse me." And so Zitella

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"A visitor," said Zitella. "Bah! some dull country wretch; but I will bawl out from where I stand that I am not at home, and then there will be something to talk about," and, raising her hand, she was about to carry out this amiable resolve, when her large, flashing eyes happened, in turning, to glance on the form of a man who had entered the hall, and appeared to be putting some eager questions to the butler.

For a few moments Zitella stood stock-still, gazing down the length of the hall at that form, the sight of which seemed to have driven the too brilliant colour from her face, and quenched all her insolent bravado; but when at last, in an impulse of fear, she turned to make her escape, the new-comer raised his head. Then their eyes met, and involuntarily he slipped back as if his surprise was quite as great and unpleasant as that which his presence had invoked.

But Zitella's momentary fear seemed by this time quite over; and, instead of retracing, she stepped forward, saying in her loud, insolent tone,—

"Hugo Brand!"

"Madam, the Marquis of Eastshire," amended the solemn butler, in his gravest tones.

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NOVELETTE—concluded.]

LOVE WINS THE DAY.

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CHAPTER VIII.—(continued.)

"If Muriel doesn't care for me it can't be helped," said Basil, gravely; "but all the coronets in the world wouldn't tempt her if she did."

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Before she could escape, however, Lord Wolferton stepped in, and, for a moment blocked the passage. His sharp eyes studied her white face, her trembling lips, her heaving chest; and then he put his hand to his waistcoat pocket, and pulled out a small bunch of red berries.

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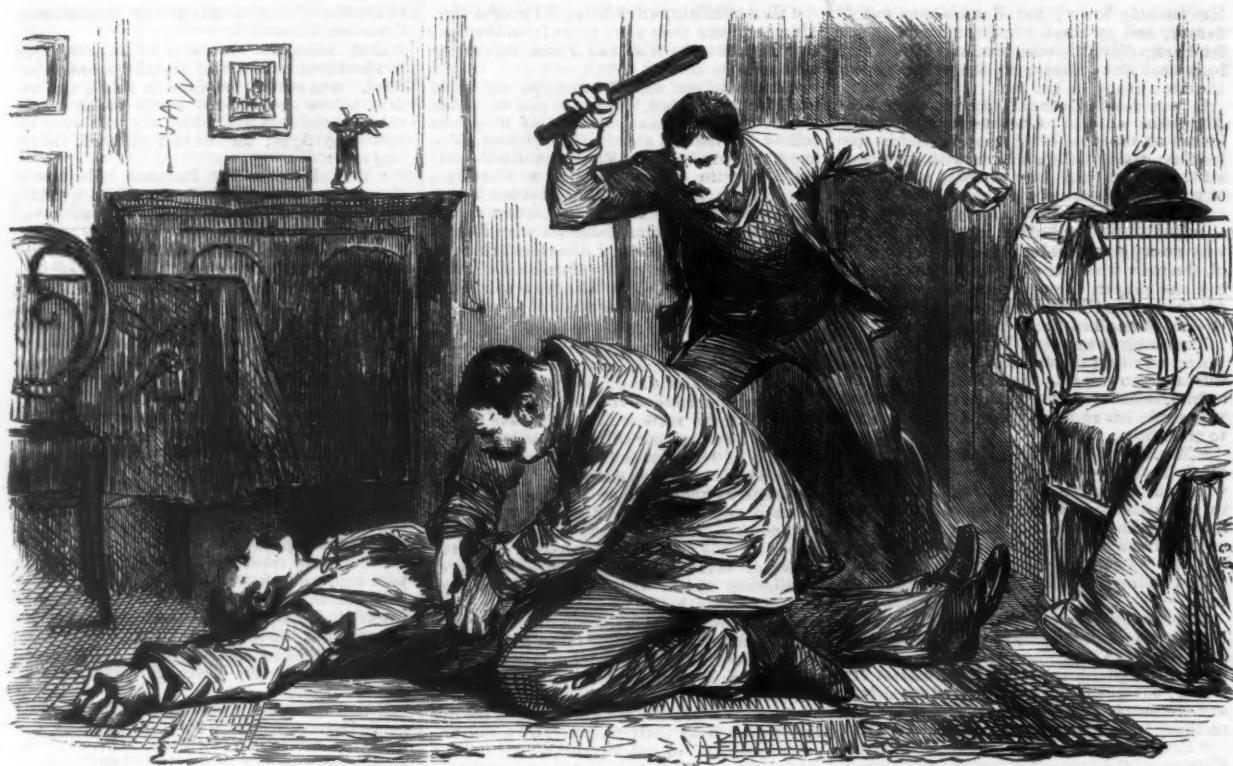
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for he knew the distance well, and even the General himself looked puzzled.

"It struck me at once that it might be burglars come after the jewels—Muriel's jewels—and I would have given my life to save them. I rushed into the room."

"How brave of you!" murmured the old soldier, admiringly.

"I flew to the window and threw it open!"

"And you saw?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing; but I suppose I dropped that hand of horses you made such a fuss about!" she said, remissfully.

"Did you hear nothing?"

"There wasn't anything to hear," angrily. "The place was as quiet as possible."

"Then you can give us no explanation of that peculiar stain on the gravel outside?" fixing his relentless eyes on her paling face.

"You didn't behave like a heroine, and shoot the burglar, as he crawled down the ladder?" in a lighter tone.

"What stain? Bless my soul! A stain on the gravel, and I was never told of it!" exclaimed the General, very much perturbed. "My dear Miss Howard, I tremble to think what might have happened to you. For Heaven's sake let all the jewels go another time, and don't endanger your precious life."

"There's nothing on earth I wouldn't do for you or Muriel, though my devotion only exposes me to contempt and ridicule," and, hiding her face, she began to sob.

If she meant to make the Viscount feel himself a brute she signally failed; but the General was almost absurd in his fervent sympathy. There is no knowing what it might have come to if there had been no witnesses, for he bent over her with the utmost tenderness, praising her courage, and entreating her to be calm.

"Say you believe me," she said, spasmodically, "and I shan't care about anything else!"

"Believe you? Of course I will!" he exclaimed, in genuine good faith. "I would sooner doubt myself."

"There, Lord Wolverton, I hope you are satisfied!" She gave him a triumphant glance, then sailed out of the conservatory by another door. As she went she dropped her glove, but Basil, his kind heart touched with compassion, slipped it into his pocket; for she was only a woman after all, and he did not wish to do her any harm.

The General was looking after his protégé with fond admiring eyes when Lord Wolverton recalled him to the unpleasant realities of life.

"If I were you I should put the affair in the hands of the police," he said, gravely. "There has certainly been some sort of struggle on the terrace, but who defended the house and fought the burglar remains a mystery. One of them lost an unpleasant amount of blood."

"You don't say so?" looking more annoyed than alarmed. "I must go and have a look myself. Come, Craven, we'll go together. You," to the Viscount, "go and talk to some of the girls, or they'll be thinking that something's up."

Lord Wolverton went off as straight as a dart to Muriel's side, for he had been inwardly chafing at being kept away from her so long.

If the General did not want him he was content to wash his hands of the whole business, but he was certain that the affair ought to be looked into at once.

"So you have torn yourself away from Miss Howard at last!" said Muriel, with a half-ironical smile.

"Yes," with a deep breath and an eloquent look. "You can't tell how refreshing it is to come from a woman like that to you."

"I wonder why you went," drawing up her neck. "You can't have been wanted by either."

"It was certainly *de trop* to one," and he laughed, leaving her in doubt as to which "one" he meant.

Basil meanwhile outside would have told the vanished burglars that they were welcome to every jewel in the world, if they would only let him go back to the drawing-room in peace.

"Well, General, what do you intend to do?" he asked, driven to the last end of his patience.

He waited some time for the answer.

The General contemplated the patch of blood, and rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I shall do nothing at all," he said, slowly. "The mischief's over. The police would pester everybody with a thousand questions, and cause that poor girl no end of annoyance!"

CHAPTER IX.

"YOU'VE MURDERED HIM!"

The dancing meanwhile was kept up with spirit, and the undercurrent of mystery, of which everyone was aware, only lent a deeper excitement to the evening.

Muriel was the only one who was conscious of the length of the *amitiés* between Miss Howard and Basil Craven, and the wildest jealousy possessed her.

She thought of the red rosebud, of the midnight talk, the morning walk, the many times that he had come to the house and gone away without seeing any one but the companion.

Even now they had both disappeared, and she concluded that, of course, they were together.

What could he see to admire in that faded face, those colourless eyebrows, that hair? Had she bewitched him as well as her father? Would she come to her tomorrow with a blush and a smile to say that she was engaged to him? She would rather die than hear it said with a glance of pretended pity in those hateful eyes. Yet how could she stop it?

Just then Lord Wolverton looked down into her own, and said, in a low voice,

"I am going away to-morrow, if nothing occurs to stop me."

A faint regret was in her tone as she answered,—

"I hope something will occur. We shall all miss you!"

She did not grow pale, or even look inclined to cry; but he never wanted her so much as now, when she seemed to want him so little.

"You can stop me in a moment if you like!"

"Then stay!" with a smile, as she fanned herself, gently. "My father loves his games of billiards, and I like my rides—with you."

"If I stay now you will never get rid of me again!" looking at her lovely face with a rare tenderness in his eyes.

For an instant it flashed across her that here was an opening for her escape. Miss Howard could never triumph in stealing her lover from her. Basil could never think she was disappointed if she announced her engagement to his brother.

Lord Wolverton was nice to look at—a perfect gentleman, or so he seemed—the son of her dear old friends. Should she risk it, and electrify them all?

A light came into her eyes, her heart throbbed painfully; but just at that moment the band struck up that old favourite, "Sweet hearts!" The refrain rang in her ears,—

"Love for a year, a week, a day,
But alas! for the love that loves alway."

and Basil Craven walked across the room; As he stood before her asking for that dance, she knew that she loved him with the love that loves alway, and it would be folly and wickedness to link her life with any other.

She never answered either of them; but Lord Wolverton, wishing his brother at Jericho, walked away, hoping for another opportunity before the evening was over; and Basil stood there waiting, startled by her evident confusion, and wondering, wildly, if Miss Howard's prophecy had come true.

"I couldn't dance this with anyone but you!" he said. "Give it me; it will be the last time!"

The last time! What could he mean by that, but that for the future his life would be linked with Emmeline Howard's? She drew up her beautiful throat, and said, in a low voice,—

"If it is for the last time it isn't worth while!"

The words sounded careless and indifferent, but the sweet face had lost its colour, and there was a suspicious tremble about the corners of her pretty lips, which gave him courage and renewed hope.

"It is your own fault!" with his back towards the crowded room, his face towards the girl whom he knew, in his heart of hearts, to be his fate. "We might have had a thousand dances more if you had wished it."

"Don't talk to me like that!" she exclaimed, with petulance, born of irritation and pain. "Give your dances to Miss Howard. She will appreciate them more, and you will have much pleasure in giving them!"

"Do I care one straw whether I dance with her this evening or any other night in my life?" he said, wrathfully.

"Of course you do!" with flashing eyes. "Oh! I don't try to humbug me. It's too late in the day. I know all about everything!" her lip curling with supreme disdain, as she imagined that he loved the companion, and was ashamed to confess it. "Haven't you spent all the rest of the evening in her society? Look! she is walking for you now!" He did not turn his head, for he would not show the smallest particle of interest.

"I don't care a hang if she is," he said, fiercely. "Is her stupid face to come for ever between you and me?"

"I wouldn't be ashamed of caring for her if I were you," her poor young heart swelling with scorn as her idol seemed to be falling in the mire. If he had really stooped to loving Emmeline Howard, why did he hesitate to confess it?

"Ashamed!" The blood rushed up into his noble face, and he stood up straight as a post. "Do you think I'm such an underbred sneak as that? If I loved any woman on earth, and wasn't as true to her in public as I was in private, I should deserve to be kicked out of your father's house!"

"You can't deceive me," she said, sadly. "You can't tell me that you don't care for her more than for anyone else?"

"But I can—I swear I can!" he cried, excitedly. "I should be thankful to Providence if I knew that I should never see her again!"

She might have believed him even then, for a thrill of joy darted through her heart; but as he stooped towards her to give more emphasis to his words, the end of a long, grey glove slipped from his waistcoat, and she recognised it at once as Miss Howard's. To make matters worse, as soon as he saw that her eyes were fixed upon it, he caught it back, and hid it in as guilty a fashion as he could.

"You dare to tell me that now!" she said, scornfully, as she rose from her seat. "Go back to her! I won't detain you any longer!" And, with a haughty bend of her head she walked away, and left him standing there by the side of the empty ottoman.

He felt inclined to tear the glove to ribbons, and to curse the whole feminine sex from beginning to end.

"What more could a girl want?" he wondered, angrily, "than that letter he had written, offering himself and all that belonged to him! And yet he could have sworn, from the look in her lovely eyes, as well as from the agitation of her manner, that she loved him still. Who could imagine him to be so insane as to prefer that Albino-faced Miss Howard to the loveliest girl in England? No; that was only a pretence—her jealousy—a peg on which to hang her anger. He had been a fool to come there at all; but he could soon take himself off."

He went straight to the hall, caught up his hat and overcoat, and opening the big door for himself, stepped out into the frosty starlight. The cold, sweet air was refreshing to him, as he sauntered down the terrace with his hands in his pocket, but his mind was too troubled for him to notice the beauty of the autumn night. What if Miss Howard had played him false from the first? She had always cautioned him not to speak to Muriel. She had often engrossed him, so that he could not get near her at all. That very evening she had prevented him from dancing the first dance with her—and then her whole conduct that night had been so strange. If she had been an adventress, she could not have looked more guilty. And was there any connection between that awful stain on the gravel, and the other, which still soiled her glove?

Intending to take the short cut through the garden and to walk the rest of the way home through the park, he went round by the front of the house. The strains of "Do not forget me" came softly through the lighted windows, but they brought no message to his angry heart.

He wished to heaven he could forget Muriel, and get back his pleasure in life; but he knew that he never would, for his love had gone from him like a wilful bird, never to return to its nest.

Lost in thought he stood stock-still, reviewing his wrongs, when suddenly he heard a voice say, in a hoarse whisper,—

" You've murdered him, and you ain't going scot-free if I knows it!"

Basil started, looking up and down in utter bewilderment, for the words seemed to come from out of the ground. They were followed by a sound as of a woman sobbing.

Then he sprang to the parapet, looked over it, and cleared it at a bound. But when he had landed in a laurentius bush, and recovered his equilibrium, there was nothing to be seen.

He followed the line of the terrace, peering into the bushes as he went, but it was impenetrably dark close against the balustrade, and he passed by a panting, shrinking form without seeing it.

Emmeline Howard held her breath as he stopped still for an instant. Her soul felt sick with fear.

If he found her out now nothing could save her. Even if, out of chivalrous pity, he let her go free, she would have to go back to the sordid, shifty life she loathed, and give up the comfort and the luxury which she loved in her self-indulgent soul; and everywhere for the rest of her weary days the remembrance of his scorn would pursue her like a wolf at the heels of a fugitive.

He stopped to listen, and her guilty heart throbbed so loudly that she thought he must hear it.

How slowly the moments lagged in her fearful suspense! He moved on, and she breathed again.

Very cautiously she crept out of her hiding-place, and all doubled up, almost on all-fours, found her way to the first flight of steps. Once up them, she thought, she would be safe.

Clinging to the ornamental balustrade, and bending low so as to be hidden in shadow, she reached the terrace.

She did not dare to raise herself up until she was close under the shadow of the house, lest Basil should catch sight of her from down below.

She did not hear anything but the music, for the band was close to the window outside which she was standing.

" Do not forget me!" seemed mixed up with all the horror of the night, and she felt as if it were her own distracted heart pleading with Basil Craven.

Ouh to be sheltered against his honest heart, safe from the storm that threatened! But she must not be found out here.

In nervous haste she hurried from window to window. They were all closed except the end one in the drawing-room, and every door was

bolted. Evidently the General was on his guard, and, and had given strict orders about the safety of the house.

But how was she to get in? She could not present herself in her present plight before the astonished eyes of all the guests.

It had been bad enough before, but it was worse now, with the traces of tears on her cheeks, and lumps of wet soil on her dress. Suddenly she bethought herself of the conservatory. That door was sure to be unlocked, so that the male guests might pass in and out to smoke a cigarette if so inclined; and if by a fortunate chance there was no one in it, she could slip through it into the library, without being noticed. At any moment the waltz might cease, and then a number of heated couples would be sure to hurry into the coolness of the conservatory.

She ran along outside the lighted windows of the drawing-room until she reached its glass walls, but there was a thick mist on the inside, produced by condensed heat; and she could not see into the interior at all.

Panting for breath she came fast round the corner, and almost ran into Basil Craven's arms.

Recovering herself with wonderful presence of mind, she realised that this was her best opportunity of winning back his confidence.

" I was looking for you," she said breathlessly, as she laid both her hands upon his arm. " Tell me that you trust me still!"

" How can I tell?" he answered quickly, as all his doubts and suspicions crowded on his mind. " Sometimes you seem my friend; sometimes my worst enemy. And then to-night"—he paused, looking down to her agitated face, which he could only see dimly in the twilight, with puzzled eyes.

" Yes, to-night!" she said, with a little catch in her breath. " When I've risked my life to save Muriel's diamonds! They are all blind idiots to blame me—but I don't care. Let them think me the worst woman that ever lived—but Basil, my own—my own—you will trust me? You will love me? You will swear that poor Em Howard was as innocent as yourself!"

In a paroxysm of entreaty, forgetful of womanly dignity and woman's self-respect—forgetting, indeed, of all but her despairing love—she flung her arms round his neck, and rested her head on his breast.

Before he could release himself the conservatory door opened. He caught a glimpse of Muriel Plowden in all her beauty; but there was someone else with her, who shut the door quickly, as a scared look came into her lovely eyes!

CHAPTER X.

" WHO IS EMMA?"

SURPRISED, horrified, and intensely disgusted, but too chivalrous ever to be rough to a woman, Basil gently unlocked Emmeline's clinging arms and drew himself away.

" You are excited! You don't know what you are saying. To-morrow you will be so sorry for this," he said gently.

She drew herself up and laughed.

" My dear Mr. Craven, I only wanted to shock you. You are always so dreadfully proper. Can you tell me what became of a glove that I lost?" shaking from head to foot with inward rage, and ready to die of disappointment and mortification.

" It is here!" drawing it out of his waist-coat.

She caught hold of it eagerly, and hid it somewhere about her dress with the utmost celerity. And then she leant against the wall for a moment, overcome by her defeat, and wondering what there was left her to hope for.

Like lightning it flashed across her brain that George was dying, or dead. Basil had placed himself out of reach, but the General was left.

Yes, by coaxing him into a marriage with

her she could revenge herself on Muriel as well as on her lover. And with the thought came new life and new energy. She raised herself, full of her new project, her eyes shining with the hope of revenge; and just at that moment the long-delayed moon—which had favoured the escape of the burglars, and even enabled them to return and fetch their ladder—shone full on the perfect beauty of Basil Craven's face. A dagger seemed to strike through her heart, and with a gesture of despair she hid her own face in her hands, sobbing violently.

Like most men he hated the sight of tears, and felt as if he would do anything to stop them. Involuntarily he came a step nearer. Her heart throbbed, for she seemed to know that words of pity and tenderness were on his lips; but as he remembered the soiled glove, her strange outburst of passion and all the dark suspicions she had roused in his enigmatic soul, he only whispered,—

" Good-night and good-bye! I shall probably never see you again."

She heard his retreating footsteps on the gravel, and, as they went further and further into the darkness of the night, cold despair seized on her aching heart. He was gone, and she would never look upon his face again. Good-bye to her love dream, and welcome revenge!

A lovely autumn morning, cold and crisp, with sunshine streaming on red and golden leaves, and the grass wet with the bygones frost.

Muriel Plowden at one time in her life never rested her golden head upon her pillow without falling asleep at once; but now she had got into the habit of tossing from side to side in wild unrest, and her thoughts were no longer the happy thoughts of youth.

It was early, but she could not stay in bed. As she walked she remembered how happy she was the day that Emmeline Howard first arrived, how eloquently Basil Craven's eyes had told the love that his lips were afraid to utter; and yet from that day forth her happiness had declined as fast as the sun on a winter's day.

By little degrees Mr. Craven got into the habit of talking to the new companion instead of to the young, old friend; and then followed the midnight talk, when he dropped the rose, the glove treasured in his waistcoat, the glimpse she caught of him holding that wretched woman in his arms, which confirmed her worst suspicions, and proved that he whom she had always considered the soul of honour had told her an outrageous lie! And yet, with a fathomless sigh, which ought never to have come from such a youthful breast, she remembered how good and true and noble he looked when he said he would scorn to be ashamed of the woman he loved.

Ah! what a puzzle life had become, and where would she find the clue? As she came to a turn in the path which wound in and out amongst some rookery in what was called "the rock garden," a shabby little boy suddenly darted from behind a branching fern, thrust a dirty scrap of paper into her hand, and ran off as fast as his legs could take him. She was so startled that she uttered a little cry, and Andrewen, who was working at a short distance, threw down his rake and ran up to see what was the matter.

" Good gracious, miss, whatever is it?" he asked, in surprise.

" A boy rushed at me from behind there," pointing to the fern.

" A boy? Sakes alive! Which way did he run?"

Muriel pointed down the path; and the gardener started in hot pursuit; but he was no match for the boy, who seemed to have disappeared into the bowels of the earth.

Muriel meanwhile opened the paper with fingers that scarcely dared to touch it, and read these words, indistinctly crawled across it,—

" Emma, you she fiend. Come and look at

the wreck you've made, or by the Heaven above us I'll peach!"

There was no signature, no date, and no address. Who was this mysterious Emma for whom she was so persistently mistaken? There was something uncanny about it, and she hurried back to the house holding the paper between her finger and thumb.

The General was strolling up and down the terrace enjoying his matutinal cigarettes, when he saw his daughter hurrying towards him. Instantly the quiet content went out of his face, and was replaced by a look of anxiety.

"What is it, child?" he asked, hastily, as she held up the paper in the air.

When she explained how it came into her possession his face grew graver still, and he pulled out his spectacles to study it.

"Emma, you she fiend! Bless my soul what language to address to a woman! Come and see what a wreck you've made. Does he mean to say that the woman's injured him? or by the Heaven above us I'll peach." He's a mean skunk of a fellow to threaten her, at any rate. This is becoming too much of a joke, and I really think I shall speak to the police! Oh, Miss Howard, are you there? I didn't see you come out. What do you think of it? A queer start, but, good heavens, are you ill? Quick, Muriel, some water!"

"No, no, I'm all right," said Emmeline, with a sickly smile, "only my poor head aches as if it would split. Let me look at the idiotic thing," holding out a hand which shook as if affected by the palsy.

The General handed it to her, and watched her face as she read it. She seemed irritated by his scrutiny, and turned away as if to rest against the balustrade.

"I think it's only a joke worthy of 'Jack the Ripper,'" she said, scornfully. "But speak to the police if you like. They will only think you wonderfully cowardly for a soldier!"

Crushing the paper in her hand she walked straight into the house, but presently called out of the window, "Are you never coming into breakfast? I suppose you like cold coffee!"

The General came in, looking unusually hasty, for he was offended by Miss Howard's rude speech; and Muriel was silent, for she was still puzzling over the mysterious "Emma."

"Will you pass me back that paper?" he asked, solemnly. "I mean to preserve it, whether I show it to the police or not."

"Did you want it? I'm so sorry," exclaimed Miss Howard flushing slightly. "I threw it into the fire, absentmindedly with some old letters."

"I thought you knew that I wanted to keep it?" looking round at the grate, where there was no trace of the paper left, and feeling intensely annoyed.

"How stupid of me! Of course you wanted it. You said so. Can you ever forgive me?" said Miss Howard as she ran to the fireplace, and poked about the coals with the bright tongs, though any one could see at a glance that the paper was reduced to ashes.

Muriel took a pencil out of her pocket, and scribbled a few lines on the back of an envelope. Then she handed it to her father, saying that those were the words written on the original paper. The General thanked her, and put it in his pocket, but Miss Howard exclaimed angrily,

"Nonsense Muriel. You always forget everything. How can you pretend to remember it? And it's dangerous to go and invent."

"I remember it all perfectly, and I'm not likely to invent," said Muriel, with calm dignity.

"I don't know the woman who isn't," said Miss Howard, scornfully, as she rattled the spoon in her cup. She felt intensely annoyed with Muriel for having furnished the General with a copy of George Roberts' scrawl, when she thought she had disposed of it so nicely; and she was distracted

at having to go and visit him, and so run the risk of having her name linked with his.

She had managed to keep the General quiet, but she was certain that he would get restive if any fresh attempt were made on the house. If George were really dying it would be decidedly unpleasant to go near him; but if she stayed away, after nearly killing him, he might really, in his anger at her heartlessness, make up his mind to denounce her.

It would be safer to go to him and cajole him with soft words, for he was always pliable and easy to manage. A few minutes later she said, carelessly,—

"Any commissions for York?"

"None, thanks! I'm at the end of my allowance, and I've nothing to spend," Muriel asserted with a smile, for she knew that she could get anything she wanted out of her father.

"Going into York?" exclaimed the General in surprise. "I thought you had a headache? Put it off till another day."

"I can't! My tooth aches horribly. I'm going to have it out," putting up her hand to her face.

The General was full of sympathy in a moment, and said he must insist upon escorting her, an offer which she declined with her usual abruptness. He then suggested that she should go by the next train, but she told him that she should not feel up to it till the afternoon; and as to going about in the dusk, she had been accustomed to that all her life. And then she looked up into his face with a sorrowful smile; and he remembered her hard lot, and forgave her that speech about the police.

In a bare, uncomfortable room, George Roberts lay on his deathbed. His face had once been very good-looking, but the cheeks were hollow, the large eyes sunk in cavernous holes under the arch of the brows, and the lips of his weak, undecided mouth, were a sort of greyish blue. He was only five-and-twenty, but his wild life was near its close, and he had never prepared for any other. By the bed knelt Emmeline Howard, for the first time in all the course of her adventurous existence abashed by the work of her hands. Why had she tempted him from his quiet life in that northern vicarage? Why had she led him over downwards like a falling star? Why had she forced him to follow by the strength of superior will, till he became like clay in her hands, and she moulded him to any shape or purpose that she would?

George raised himself on the only arm that was left him to use, and, with feverish excitement burning in his eyes, told her that all that swag in the General's room must be in the hands of the gang before the end of the month. They were at the end of their resources, and they could not be kept quiet any longer. They were in a fury against her, he said, not only because of the injury she had done to him, but because she had kept the swag from them; and nothing would prevent them from informing against her if they were taken up. It was that he meant in his hurried scrawl, "for I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head, my poor Emma," he added, with a pitiful smile. "How could I hurt the girl who has promised to be my wife?"

And then a cold shudder came over her, and in her fierce, unwomanly heart she almost hoped he would die—die before he could put a stop to the ambitious scheme which was working in her brain. George out of the way, her path would be much clearer for the future; and some day, perhaps, she would be able to forget that it was her hand that had given him the final push into the cold waters of death. She promised him that she would do her best, and give the signal at the proper time; but all the while she meant to guard the General's property most carefully, as if she married him it would become her own.

"You'll be true to me, Em, won't you, old girl?" he pleaded, with his panting breath. "You won't let any confounded swell come between us?"

"Not I, George," hastily; "and now, goodbye. I must be off," stooping over him and kissing his wasted forehead. "Is—is there anyone to take care of you?"

She scarcely waited for the answer, but rushed down the narrow, ill-lighted staircase, feeling as if she was pursued by some mocking devil. When she flung herself into the corner of a first-class carriage at Brettonby Station she gave a sigh of relief. The hateful past was breaking from her, and she would soon be free—or at least she thought so—for she had never noticed that a man had tracked her from Railway-terrace to the train—a man in the pay of one who loved her little.

CHAPTER XI.

"THIEF, MURDERESS, DIE!"

BASIL CRAVEN had departed the very day after Miss Howard's birthday, and his brother was delighted to see him off; for he was persuaded that if he remained any longer dangling about the hall he would become the prey of an adventuress. He had seen them together on the terrace, when Miss Howard made her last frantic appeal, and he had found them together in the conservatory, where he had had the pleasure of interrupting them. He was fond of his brother, after his own cool fashion, and he certainly had no wish to see a woman like Miss Howard brought into the family. He wondered how the Plowdens could tolerate her airs, for he could see at a glance that she was no lady; and it was only a case of the old proverb about setting a beggar on horseback. If the General were so foolish as to take no steps about the attempted burglary, he determined to take upon himself to watch the burglars' accomplice. He was quite willing to wait a little while longer in the neighbourhood on Muriel Plowden's account. And he thought it would be some amusement to watch over Miss Howard's little game, especially if thereby he could save his brother from the maddest marriage that was ever heard of. So he stayed on, and paid his almost daily visits at the Hall, devoted himself to Muriel, and quite disarming Miss Howard's suspicions by his quiet, unruffled courtesy to herself.

She thought all danger was past, but she had a little shock when Andrewes came to the study one day, and showed the General a bit of gold-work which he had found in the mouth of a drain.

It was bent and out of shape, but as he took care to point out, it was originally the framework of a star out of which the jewels had been picked by a clever little tool.

Muriel immediately claimed it as the setting of her lost star—a notion which Miss Howard laughed to scorn.

The General did not say much, but he knitted his brows, and locked it up carefully in his desk.

This was a new complication which he had not in the least expected, for it proved that the star had been stolen and the jewels extracted by some one in the house.

He wondered what Lord Wolferton would make of it, but was afraid to ask him lest he should chaff him about his former supineness.

Basil still kept away, and Muriel's lovely eyes had a wistful expression in them, as if their owner had lost something still more important than a diamond star.

Whenever she could she got away from the others, and went off for a wild scamper across the moors on her favourite little horse.

One day she was caught in a storm, and drenched to the skin. She guided her horse into a shed, but the biting wind came through the boarding, and she was chilled to the bone.

When she reached home nothing would warm her, and it soon turned out that she had caught a violent cold. It settled on her chest, and the doctor feared that she would have congestion of the lungs.

The General was dreadfully alarmed; but Miss Howard did her best to soothe his fears.

It suited her plans admirably to have Muriel confined to her sick room, and she studiously talked of unpleasant things when she paid her an evening visit, in order that she might not sleep too well at night, and therefore recover too soon.

Muriel had plenty of time for reflection whilst she was laid up; and as she thought of all the duties which had slipped from her hands into Miss Howard's, she wondered at her own weakness.

It had been her pride to keep house for her father, and be praised by him for her successful management.

It had been her great delight to visit the villagers, and take the sick and needy something from the many luxuries of the dinner-table; but all these pleasures had been usurped by the companion, and she realised for the first time in all its bitterness that she was reduced to a cipher in her own home.

Miss Howard was, meanwhile, making as good a use of her opportunities as she could. First she had instigated in the most underhand manner that the finding of the setting of the lost star shrew suspicion on Greenbrook.

The maid was with her mistress when she first missed the star, and no one else had been near her.

She also affirmed that she had lost a brooch from her room—a brooch which she described exactly, but which no one in the house had ever seen.

Leaving the General both puzzled and angry, she went up to Muriel and reduced her to indignant tears.

She would not believe anything against her maid, but it made her so anxious and unhappy that she could not sleep that night, and looked so white and heavy-eyed in the morning that Miss Howard, on one pretext or another, prevented the General from coming to see her.

She was always telling him that his visits excited the patient too much, till he kept away so much, from love for his child, that Muriel began to think he was no longer fond of her.

An exultant light came every now and then into Miss Howard's eyes, for all her schemes seemed to be prospering finely.

Although she neglected Muriel entirely she posed before the General as her devoted nurse; and he was drawn to like her more and more because of the affection she was supposed to lavish on his daughter.

Miss Howard really thought that she had worked upon him so successfully that in a few days he would propose to make her Mrs. Plowden, and mistress of his splendid house.

Then she would have her revenge; and Basil Craven, if he ever married Muriel Plowden, would find himself deceived as to her being an heiress.

She would insist on the General making a new will, and settling all his available money on his second wife. And then she would hold up her head as high as any one in the county; and the past, with all its unpleasant memories, should be buried in George's grave.

At this very moment the General, whom she considered as her prey, was called to town on some important business by his solicitor; and he departed without saying those fatal words which would have crowned her highest hopes.

He pressed her hand at parting, and looked down into her upturned face in quite an affectionate manner.

But his last words were,—

"I can't bear leaving my dear child just now. Tell her I shall think of her night and day."

As soon as his soldierly figure was out of sight Miss Howard stamped her foot in rage and disappointment.

"Stupid old fool!" she said, angrily. "It is dull work screwing up an old man to the required pitch!"

George Roberts discovered the General's absence, and became more urgent in his appeals.

The men, he said, would no longer be kept

back. They were determined to have the jewels at any price, and they would be just as likely as not to murder the old fellow in his bed if she kept them waiting till he came back.

She looked at him with eager eyes, for she could see that his strength was failing fast—eyes that seemed to his excited fancy like those of a vulture waiting for his death in order to feast on his bones.

"Don't look at me like that, Em," he said, in his husky voice. "You nearly did for me, but not quite. I shall pull through in time to marry you, see if I don't."

"And if you don't," she asked, with a sudden shiver, "You won't curse your poor Em, will you?"

"Ay, that I will," his expression changing into one of fierce revenge. "If you've done for me you shall have no peace in this world or the next. But," with a weary smile, "I shall be better to-morrow. We'll have our banns put up before long."

She turned away, saying she must go. She did not kiss him, and went off without a word of tenderness, for in her callous heart she was beginning to be angry with him for being alive.

She had no fear of being discovered this time, for the General was away, and Muriel shut up safely in her room, so she had told no lie about going to York, and was getting into the train at Brettonby with a confident smile on her lips, when she dropped her umbrella. Stooping to pick it up she met the eyes of an insignificant-looking man, and in an instant it flashed across her that she had seen him before. But where—where? Had he been watching her?

She turned deathly cold at the mere thought of it, for to be watched meant utter destruction.

She saw nothing of him, however, at Beechwood, and recovering her composure told herself that she was a fool to be so easily scared.

As she was driving home—for she had ordered the dog-cart to meet her—her quick eyes caught sight of a beggar leaning on a gate.

As she came near him he took off his shabby hat and wiped his forehead with a red handkerchief, which was the signal agreed on between the members of the gang, and meant a meeting at the same place and the same hour as before.

Miss Howard was very much annoyed, for she guessed that the gang, less amenable than George, wished to drive matters to an extremity.

She set her teeth hard, and was so lost in thought that she would have driven straight into the hedge if the groom had not caught hold of the reins in a fright.

Then she remembered herself, and gave him a snub for having saved the cart and horse from a catastrophe.

She went upstairs to Muriel as soon as she reached the Hall, and her cold heart thrilled with satisfaction as she noticed the feverish flush on her cheek, and the weary droop of her head.

She thought she was certain to fade away, as her mother had done before her, and then the coast would be clear.

What a fortunate thing it was that Basil Craven had gone away, for his love might have acted as a tonic!

"My father is coming home on Thursday," Muriel said, with a sigh. "It seems such a time to wait!"

"Quite soon enough," Miss Howard replied, with unusual frankness, but she added as her reason that she wanted the drawing-room to be turned out.

"I shall go down stairs to-morrow. I'm tired of being moped to death up here."

"Indeed you won't!" hastily. "Dr. Evans says you are to be kept in the same atmosphere," and then she hurried away, for she had to make an important decision.

It seemed such a ridiculous thing to hand over all those diamonds, sapphires, and rubies

into the hands of the gang, when if she had only had the sense to hold her tongue they might have been kept to adorn her own faded self.

The more she thought of it, the more it went against her.

At midnight she slipped out of the drawing-room window and went straight down the steps across the wet grass to the large clump of rhododendrons, behind which she knew that a man named Black Jem would be hiding.

She had not the same influence over him as over George, and she could not get him to consent to any delay.

He insisted that she should give them all the assistance she could, or else, if they failed, they would denounce her.

He was rough and coarse in his manner, and made her swear a fearful oath that she would act on the square, and put the signal in the window for the next night—Wednesday.

She came back to the house in a sulken rage, and stealing upstairs through the dead silence, made her way to the General's dressing room. With a false key she opened the box which contained the jewels, and feasted her eyes on their splendours.

She had forbore to take anything before for fear of drawing suspicion on herself, after they had been removed from the safe by her advice.

But now the General would conclude that the gang had taken all, and the gang would never miss what they had never seen.

She was bound by her oath not to take them, but no one would ever know anything about it, and a sin undiscovered was no sin at all, according to her creed.

A cold sweat broke out on her brow, nevertheless, as she slipped a diamond spray into the bosom of her black grenadine, and then a sapphire brooch. How she longed to take them all, for sapphires would look so well on her golden hair, she thought, in her vanity!

She felt very uncomfortable as soon as she had shut up the box, and the deed was done. There was a chink in the shutter which she had not noticed before, but whilst she abused the carelessness of the servants she did not wait to rectify it.

As she walked stealthily down the corridor she staggered back against the wall, for, straight in front of her, there stood a white figure, with an awful face, like the face of the dead.

Slowly it raised its left arm, and pointed at her.

"Thief! murderer! die!"

These words seemed to come from George's pallid lips, and, though only conjured up by her excited imagination and her evil conscience, they struck her down like an uplifted sword.

She tumbled in a heap on the floor, gasping, "George, have pity!" and then her senses left her.

The cold, tardy light of morning was breaking through the shutters, when she woke up, and fled like a scared rabbit to her room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SIGNAL.

Not a breath of wind was stirring on Wednesday, and the air was so still that the barking of a dog or the tinkle of a sheep-bell could be heard at a long distance. All the servants had gone to bed, and the hour for the signal was close at hand.

Still Emmeline Howard lingered by the drawing-room fire for a presentiment of evil was strong upon her, and she hesitated to fulfil her evil compact. And yet, if she waited all the year round, when would she find a better opportunity?

The General was in London, Basil Craven in Scotland, Muriel shut up in her room.

It was folly to linger there when her fate was in the hands of these ruffians, and a quarter of an hour's delay would be bitterly paid for.

An inexorable necessity drove her on. She

put the lamp out, for she always preferred to do that for herself, in order that the servants might have no excuse for coming in a second time; and then taking a silver candlestick in her hand, she went upstairs to her room and shut her door rather noisily in order that anyone might hear that she had gone to bed as usual.

Some time later she put out her head, listened, and stepped noiselessly into the corridor. Hearing nothing she went swiftly, but with the utmost caution, to the General's dressing room.

She opened the shutters, unfastened the window, pushed it gently open; then taking a tall candle in a china candlestick from the mantelshelf she lighted it, and placed it on a small table in the window. This done she hurried out of the room possessed by a sudden horror, and never drew a breath till she stood outside the closed door.

It was just here she saw poor George's ghost last night, and all her hair stood on end at the thought of it. If it came again she thought she would die. But this was no time for weakness. She pulled herself together, and crept softly to Muriel's door.

There wasn't the slightest sound inside, so she felt certain that she was fast asleep. Quietly she turned the key in the lock, and made the patient into a prisoner.

"They will think the burglars did it to keep her quiet!" she said to herself, "and it will prevent all danger from this quarter."

And then she went back to her room, shivering with unaccustomed nervousness. She put on a walking dress in case of an emergency, and covered it up with a pale blue dressing gown, so that if she ran out anyone might think she had just got out of bed; and then she began the work she ought to have done the night before.

With some sharp tweezers and picks, especially fashioned for the purpose, she loosened the jewels from the frames. Not a scrap of her light could be seen outside, for the curtains were drawn over the shutters, a thick mat shielded the crack under the door, and she had filled up the keyhole with paper.

She was very much absorbed by the glittering heap, which was gradually increasing on the sheet of paper which she had laid in her lap. What a comfort it was to possess them! If she were driven from her present home they would save her from starving—if she rose to the position she coveted they would add a charm to her toilettes such as they had never possessed before.

She was startled from her gloating dreams by the shaking of the shutters. The wind had risen, which she thought a good thing, as the stillness had been much against successful burgling.

There was no need to disturb herself. Black Jem had told her to keep dark, and as his advice perfectly agreed with her own wishes she had obeyed it.

She looked up at her watch—a large-sized gold one, which had once belonged to George Roberts, but she had pilfered him of that, as of all else that was worth having. The hands pointed to a quarter-past twelve, and her heart throbbed fast, for that was the exact time fixed for the robbery.

Suddenly there was a shout of "Fire, fire!" which sent her bounding from her chair. She stood, palpitating, in the centre of the room, her eyes wide open. This was a catastrophe which she had never contemplated!

Oh! she would fly, fly at once—nothing would induce her to stay and be burnt alive! With no thought for others she ran to the wardrobe, and quickly attired herself in her ulster and hat, drawing a thick veil over her face.

The jewels she caught up with shaking fingers, and crammed them into a canvas bag, which she placed in a secret pocket inside her coat, which she had found very convenient on other occasions.

When she was ready she began to recollect that the house was a large one, and could not be burnt down in a hurry. It would look odd if there were no danger to appear in a hat, but the ulster would seem like a sensible protection from the flames.

She tore off her hat, and thrust it into the wardrobe. The sounds in the house were increasing, women were shrieking, and suddenly, above everything, rang out a pistol-shot, followed by another and another.

In a panic she ran to the door, unlocked it, and rushed helter-skelter against a policeman. He turned, quick as lightning, and caught her by the wrist.

"Emma Leaf," he said, curtly, "I arrest you in the name of the Queen!"

In an instant she became deadly cold, and her knees knocked against each other. She struggled desperately to free herself, and as she struggled she caught sight of General Plowden's tall form coming down the passage.

"General! Come here. Save me!" she screamed. "He takes me for someone else."

But to her despair his blue eyes flashed with contempt and loathing, and she saw that she had fooled the simple, honourable soldier, for the last time.

"Take her back to her room, and guard the door. I will consider her case in the morning."

Then he turned away, and her last hope gone, Emmeline Howard fell in a heap at the policeman's feet.

Lord Wolferton's detective had done his work well. He had tracked Black Jem to his conference behind the rhododendron, and overheard all his plans.

The conversation confirmed his suspicion that the Miss Howard who flaunted about the world as an unfortunate gentlewoman was the Emma Leaf, of plebeian birth, whom he had the pleasure of detecting in the crime of forgery about thirteen years before.

She had served her time of penal servitude, and come out more reckless than ever.

Joining herself on to Black Jem's gang, she had been one of their ablest confederates. When he told this story to the Viscount he telephoned to the General as well as his brother. Both arrived as soon as they could. The former was terribly upset, and could scarcely be made to credit it. He said he would not condemn Miss Howard till he saw with his own eyes the signal placed in the window, and the burglars attempt the house.

Basil, to Lord Wolferton's immense relief, declared that the story only confirmed his dormant suspicions.

Having asked for a sufficient force of police they went to the Hall, under cover of the night, and placed themselves in convenient positions in the garden, behind the ornamental shrubs. The General was able to see Miss Howard place the candle and open his window, so that, before he caught sight of a single burglar, she had lost her trusty champion.

All those who were waiting in eager impatience wondered at the brilliant light which issued from the room—a light which might have alarmed a county, instead of acting as a stealthy signal to some thieves. They did not guess that the curtains had caught the flame of the candle, and that the fire was creeping slowly and surely from one side of the room to the other.

Black Jem cursed the woman's folly as he saw that light, and wondered if she meant to bring every bobby in the county on their track.

"Sharp's the word," he said to his mates, and they dashed at their job with such stealthy speed that they had their ladder up against the house as soon as they reached the terrace. Black Jem was the first to go up, but he was so blinded by the smoke that he could see nothing.

A second followed—whilst a third stood at the foot. Some of the policemen were quite close now. And as the two men above, in their haste, hoisted the box on to the ledge

of the window—and not able to wait to lower it—sent it down with a crash, they rushed forward, seized the man at the foot, and swarmed up the ladder.

Then there was a fierce struggle in the midst of the smoke and flames—when neither could see the other's face.

The burglars fought desperately, but the cry of "Fire! fire!" was being raised on all sides.

And the General, with one hoarse cry, "My child! my child!" forgot everything else but his daughter's danger; and rushed wildly to the nearest door he could find, and he and the Viscount tried to shake it off its hinges, when it was thrown open by Everard.

Basil was struggling with another of the gang, who had been left outside as a scout, but he gave him his quietus, and left a man to watch him, and then dashed up the ladder and into the burning room regardless of his own danger. The burglars were in the next room, with their backs to the wall, and revolvers in their hands; but there were enough policemen to secure them, so he hurried on. The pistol-shots rang in his ears as he hurried towards the room which he knew to be Miss Plowden's.

"Muriel, Muriel!" he shouted out, but no answer came; only Greenbrook rushed towards him, wringing her hands.

"Her door's locked, sir, and I can't find the key. I never knew her to do it before."

"Perhaps it was locked for her," he said, sternly. "Stand aside!"

Throwing himself upon it with all his strength he broke it in, and fell over something lying on the threshold. The smoke was blinding, but he knew in a moment that it was the girl he was looking for; and with a great fear in his heart he lifted her in his strong arms, and carried her through the servants, who were now crowding the passage, into a small room, which he knew that she used as a boudoir. There he laid her on the sofa, and knelt down by her side, and would not stir till the long lashes lifted and the lovely eyes looked into his. Greenbrook placed a candle on the table, and went off in search of restoratives, so far one precious instant the lovers were alone.

"My darling, my darling!" he whispered, and the clouds of doubt rolled away, and a soft smile stole over her pretty mouth. He stooped his head and kissed her on the lips with all the passion of his long pent-up love, and the next moment the General hurried into the room. He clasped her in his arms, then he turned to Basil and held out his hand.

"My boy, you only saved her just in time," he said, with a sob in his throat. "Heaven knows what would have happened in another minute. What don't I owe you!"

"You owe me nothing," said Basil, with a joyous smile. "Without her life what would mine have been?"

Finding that his daughter was safe the General sent for the fire-engines, and the burglars being secured, the whole household assisted in putting out the fire.

The whole gang was arrested except George Roberts, who had died the same night as his ghost appeared to the woman who had been the curse of his life. Lord Wolferton had the satisfaction of seeing Miss Howard, alias Emma Leaf, robbed of her airs and graces, and standing in the dock. Her light hair had turned grey; her face looked old, and wizen, and dogged. But no one felt the smallest pang of pity for her, for Basil Craven had discovered her cruel forgery, and her utter falsehood, and it was rumoured far and wide that she had killed her accomplice and broken his father's heart.

Emma Leaf was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude, before a crowded court, and the General acknowledged that she only got what she deserved. He knew that she had deceived him with false references, that she had stolen the jewels, and spent the household money on herself; but, perhaps, what irri-

tated him more than anything else was the discovery that she had induced a number of tradesmen to trust her with valuable goods on credit, because, as she informed them, she was about to become General Flodden's wife!

Lord Wolverton felt that he had been very badly treated, for he had done more than anyone else, and got nothing for his pains. The General was quite shy of him for a long time, lest he should use that despicable phrase, "I told you so"; but the Viscount was generous enough to content himself, with a twinkle in his eye.

Muriel recovered her health with her happiness, and looked as lovely as possible when she stood by Basil Creaven's side in the old grey church. The long night of doubt and sorrow was over, and the sunshine of perfect content was theirs!

[THE END.]

DR. DENHAM'S WIFE.

It was a sweet pale face that looked through the window, the forehead pressed against the pane, the eyes following the form of Dr. Denham retreating through the stormy twilight.

The wind wrapped his cloak about him, but he strode along with a step firm with a certain spirit of undaunted determination. It would not be quite easy to say why that firm step and determined air gave comfort to the owner of that pale sweet face as she watched them.

It was a thin face, in which still were lines of youth, if not much blush and bloom, and in the dark blue eyes beneath their black lashes a lover might have found beauty if the owner, since the day that her first love forsook her, had not refused to listen to another. And yet—if it were not that in the hollows of her heart the memory of that first love lingered—if she had not felt, out of her forgiveness for his inconstant youth, that he waited for her in some region where it was always youth—if—if, in short, she could have forgotten him, she might have filled her life afresh with all the joy of loving and of being beloved.

For this man who was battling with the wind in the twilight had been battling with her will this half-dozen years, sometimes fancying he saw conquest approaching in a moment's irresolution, always experiencing defeat, never giving up hope. She herself regarded Dr. Denham's love for her as an infatuation, feeling that there was nothing in her to deserve such devotion, unaware of the beauty of her soul that looked out of her eyes, and shone through all her life, and always debared from thinking of the love he offered by recollection of the love of which she had been despoiled.

She had not heard from that lover of her youth for more than a dozen years; she thought, of course, he must be dead; she had lain awake many a night picturing his regret, his grief, the return of his old affections, or else following his soul into that other life which we call death, recalling his beauties, forgetting his errors, disbelieving his sins, adoring his memory, her life ruled by love of a shadow of what was not.

And in the arms of that form now retreating down the avenue rest and shelter and happiness awaited her, and she would have none of them; she would not be unfaithful to her first love; and whenever her heart softened towards Dr. Denham, and ached a little for the comfort of his presence, she reproached herself as a weak and wicked woman; and she felt that she had a right to no better fortune when she looked at the little picture of Allan that she had not given back to him when he left her in the brief passion kindled by the topaz eyes, the damask blushes, the pulpy lips of Doris Black.

But somehow that little picture of a hand.

some and immature boy of twenty had ceased to work its old spell upon her. No thrill or heart-throb of hers now answered its glance; and she thought bitterly how poor a creature she was that year should so dull emotion in her, and that she would never, anyway, say even that she cared for him, do such injury to Dr. Denham, noble, heroic, patient soul that he was, as to give him now any portion of a heart that was so incapable of constancy as hers.

Perhaps when he left her that twilight, as she stood against the old Stuart portrait, the fire gliding its frame, but the gloom obliterating its subject, so that she herself looked like a pictured lady in a frame, so still and gentle was she—perhaps when he held both her hands in his moment, and bending, kissed them, as one kisses a sacred object in a shrine, he felt more hope than he had ever allowed himself before, wondering if truly she were not beginning to see that she was holding herself faithful to the shadow of what was not. And all the way along, meeting a surly tramp, passed by a woman running like a wild-cat, he kept saying to himself, "A sweeter woman never drew breath than my son's wife Amy."

As he turned the corner and was gone, those eyes, still looking after him, observed another form in the gloom, a slouching, ill-favoured outline—that of some tramp who was going round to the end door, and who should not be refused his share, Miss Amy said, as she turned to her servant, of such of the Christmas dainties as were left.

"But it's no use talkin', miss," answered Susan; "you've ben giving and ben giving all day, till these ain't barely more than enough for your own dinner. There ain't but one pie left when all's told, and if you're goin' without pie at Christmas, I'd like to know the reason why. I sha'n't give the creatur a bite. So there! You're not goin' to starve yourself to feed all the tramps that come to the gate!"

"I sha'n't starve, Susan."

"No, I don't mean you shall. I sha'n't neither. I want a mince pie, if you don't. I'll give him a hunk of bread and meat, if you like, and he can go along to the next town."

"Susan," said Miss Amy, "bring me that pie." And Susan, who had stood up defiant as a robin on his tail a moment before, brought her the article in question at once—for Amy had gone into the kitchen at the sound of the beggar's rap—but brought with it a toss that made Miss Amy feel the impending shadow of a day of reckoning. She went along herself to the door where stood the mendicant, and for a moment confronted him.

"My good man," she was going to say, in beginning a little encouraging talk to him.

But she said nothing. She left the pie in his hands and shut and bolted the door, and staggered back to a chair by the fire, and closed her eyes, and held her hands over them, as if to shut out the sight she had seen.

"Amy!" the man had cried and plunged away.

But Susan—old Susan, who had been her maid, and her mother's before her, for how many a year?—had seen the face, had heard the voice as well; and after a moment of hesitation she went and knelt by the side of her mistress, and took the pretty head and rested it on her own shoulder, and patted the soft dark hair with the touch a mother gives a grieving child.

"There! there!" she murmured. "You was just sayin' you didn't know as you'd any thing to be thankful for—and there 'tis. You're bet of him, anyway."

"Oh, Susan!" she shuddered. "I thought this long while he was dead. I'd rather have seen him dead."

"So'd I, of course. And he's about the same—about the same as dead. He's dead to all decency. But I never expected to see Allan a bloated, blear-eyed, rum-soden beggar in fatters. And less 'n fifteen year, too. It don't take long to make a rag out of a man. Well, if this ain't been a day of providences!

And that t'other creature upstairs, too. There! there! don't cry."

Miss Amy slowly lifted her head.

"I'm not crying," she said. "I ought to cry to think that once it would have broken my heart. And that now it's only the regret one must have to see any poor—human-being—so. I'm not—"

And then the tears came in a flood.

Susan lifted the slender form and laid it on the sofa, and presently she brought a hot cup of tea and made Amy drink it, and wet her handkerchief in cologne water and wiped her forehead with it, and then put on fresh coal, and shut the shutters, and came back to her.

"Now," said she, "you ain't nothin' but a baby. And Allan ain't nothin' to you. And you don't care anyway. And I'm precious glad, for my part, that the thing's happened; for now you see where you be. Bitter medicine's bitter in the mouth, but it clears the blood. You were a settin' up of an old image, and bowing down before it, when there's been a live man and a live lover waitin' for you, and you might a' hen Mrs. Dr. Denham, and had the whole place at your feet, and have made happiness to boot for the best man that this earth ain't good enough for him to tread on."

"Oh, hush! Susan, hush! How can Dr. Denham care anything about a woman who has been holding such a thing as that in her heart?"

"You ain't. You've ben worshippin' a pioter you had in your mind, a sort of a shad-der in the lookin'-glass. And I've heard say that when a lookin'-glass breaks there's a death in the family. Well, that lookin'-glass is broke, and your shad-der in it's dead. You never cared nothin' about that thing. It stands to reason you couldn't. There was a girl loved a boy. Well, the girl's changed to a woman; she's an altogether different person. And the boy she loved—he's ben drowned in rum; he's drowned and dead and pickled in rum. And what's all o' that to you? It's the story of somebody else. Land sakes! I remember you when your pa was alive, and we lived in the other house, the night you went down to the gate with a red rose in your hair—the sweetest, prettiest thing you was, your eyes jest like the stars in the skies over you—and you waited, and waited, till the moon went down, and out you crep' at last, and I along after you, till you see Allan strilng down the river-side, with his arm round that Miss Black; and then you turned so quick I'd only time to get into the shad-der, and flew for home, like a frightened bird. And he see you him, and he never came near you from that day to this."

Amy's tears had ceased flowing, and she was gazing great-eyed at the speaker, as if she heard the story of another woman's life.

"I don't know as you was any prettier, no, nor half so pretty, when you was sixteen as you are now at thirty-three; someways you do make me think of a hanging white rose full of dew. Well, as I were sayin', that boy—you heard of it, I heard of it, everybody heard of it—jes' went from bad to worse, and that Doris with him. And you wouldn't believe it; you felt sure he'd come back; he couldn't help it, after all the vows he'd made to you. And you wore the string o' gold beads he give you."

"And when year by year he didn't come back, you said he was dead, and you left off wearin' the beads, but kep' them alluz on your bureau with the gold miniature case that had his pioter in it, and now that pioter of his 'n's no more'n any other fancy pioter. Well, that feller kep' on his way till he got so, 's the old wuss used to say, 'he didn't care a cuss if the wuss come to better or the better come to wuss.'

"Folks didn't tell you the half of his goings on, and nobody said nothin' after he'd run through his money and quit the place. He jest buried himself alive in sin and sotiahsness, and he died to all intense and purposes. Fact

is, he never was. You jest made him out o' moonshine. He's gone up in smoke—tobacco smoke and gin fumes. And you—you've come to your senses.

"Sakes alive! if you'd married him! What if you'd married him jest to reform him? You'd 'a' ben the dust and ashes you've ben thinkin' he was in all these years you've ben a-picturin' of him as under the sod. Now I know jest how you feel. Something you held by's gone all to pieces. But by-and-by you'll feel the solid earth under your feet."

Amy lay now with her eyes closed, but two great tears were welling out under the lids.

"You'll feel the solid earth under your feet," continued Susan, "and you'll just cling to it for dear life when you find it, for it'll be six feet of as good red dust and clay as ever trod in shoe-leather. And if you don't leave off cryin' right away, Miss Amy, I'll send for it now to come and give you a quieting potion!"

"Oh, Susan, don't—don't talk so. It's—it's really dreadful!" gasped Amy. "I'm all lost and bewildered. It was bad enough before. But I had my ideal left. And now to find that all these years I've——"

"Yes, you'd better say it. You've made a precious fool of yourself. You need to have the truth set before you boldly, 'one may say. Well, if I didn't love ye, and you didn't know it, I shouldn't deal with you this way."

"Oh, Susan," said Amy, still sobbing gently like the end of a summer shower, "I think you have said enough. But I wish it hadn't happened at Christmas."

"I'm glad it happened at Christmas!"

"I'd like to have had something left to be thankful for."

"You've got something."

"I'd like to have had my ideal left to be glad of and give thanks for."

"Your fiddlesticks! I ain't got no patience. You've got real comfort to be thankful for; you've got a home, a turkey, and plum-pudding, to say nothin' of nothin' else, and another home you can walk right into any day you say the word, and the love of a good man waitin' for you. And if you can't be thankful for that, you wouldn't be thankful if you was in heaven. Sakes alive! I most forgot that creature upstairs," cried Susan, starting up. "I ought to carry her up sun-thin' to eat by this time," she said, stirring the fire. "She said she was goin' to her friends, and was tired, and only wanted sleep. I didn't fairly like to put her on a decent bed," continued Susan, lifting a griddle to inspect the fire. "I guess I'll brile her a chop. Tiptoe up and see if she ain't sleep' her sleep out fast, though."

A moment or two later a shriek resounded, and in far less time than she had taken for tiptoeing up, Susan came springing down.

"She ain't there—she ain't there! She's gone!" she cried.

"You don't mean that?"

"I do. She opened the window, and climbed out on the shed, and run away."

"What in the world has she run away for?"

"Heaven knows! I thought I felt a draught, and it was that open winder all this blessed afternoon. Took French leave. I'll jest have a lamp, and see what else she's took."

"Oh, she's never taken anything in the world, after all the interest you showed in her, feeding her, promising her new shoes and your old cloak," said Amy, following. "What did she look like? I wish I had been here, when she came."

"She didn't look noways pertickler. Had her face tied up with the toothache, 'n' I felt for her, like the fool I be. Well," holding the lamp above her grizzled head, on which it cast a ring of light like an aureole—"she's taken me at my word. The cloak's gone. Not my old one—your bestest. Your best boots—they've taken the wings of the morning and flown to the uttermost parts of the earth. It's all my fault a-letting of her in. I wonder she didn't take your silk dress. My gracious,

she did! I can't never pay for the damage, if I work it out, in years. Le's see what else," said Susan, in accents of despair. "The gold beads! Serves you out for keepin' 'em hung up by your lookin'-glass as if they was a Catholic's rosary. Well, she's feathered her nest. I declare to man, miss, you'd orter have a guardian."

"I don't know bet I had," sighed Amy, oblivious of Susan's indignation with her and with herself. "How I used to value those beads! I have kissed them every one," she said, looking up with a shy laugh. "I couldn't tell you of it, Susan, if I cared new. I'm glad they're gone. She's welcome to them. I'm only sorry she felt obliged to take them. She might have taken the gold miniature case too; I wish she had. At least—— Well, we'll charge it all to profit and loss, Susan." And Amy took the case and the scissors downstairs, and prised out the miniature, and laid it on the parlour fire, and sat there in the fire-light watching it curl and shrivel and blaze and blacken, dreaming over old dreams as she watched, and seeing them fall to their own ash too.

How lonely she was, how desolate! Only fifteen years ago she had been full of hope and joy and youth; her lover had seemed a splendid piece of perfection to her; her happiness in him had been deep and real.

And that girl with the blazing topaz eyes had stolen him from her, had spoiled her life, and had led him on to his ruin. But for Doris Black, and her yellow eyes and her dazzling smile, she would have been now the mistress of a joyous household: on the other side of the hearth a tender husband would have sat, children might have been going and coming—dancing feet, singing voices, music, laughter, kisses, caresses—the place would have been a centre from which all good influences should have radiated; it would have been that powerful and lovely agent of good in the world—a happy home.

And now—ah! it was Doris Black that had robbed her of all that—that had robbed the world of a good man in Allan, it was she who had lured him into ways of evil, had pulled him down into the mire and filth, had made return and the desire of return impossible, had vitiated, had ruined, had destroyed him!

A whirl of anger wrapped her as she thought of it—a white fire seemed to burn at her heart. Not only the loss of her own happiness, not only her own desolation, but the debasement, the degradation, the corruption of that soul and body, rose before her, as if demanding to be avenged.

She realised it all for the first time; she was aghast with a sort of horror of it. She hoped, she could almost have prayed, that punishment might be meted out to that woman in the measure of the awful wrong that had been done.

She shuddered and grew faint at thought of what that wrong was, and she felt that she must never come face to face with Allan, lest it should not be safe—lest she herself, in a sudden frenzy, should take vengeance into her own hands.

And while she still sat there, lost in the darkness of her thoughts, there was a peal of the bell, and a sound of scuffling and confusion on the steps, and Susan bustling in with the lamps, was exclaiming. "More of them Christmas beggars, I'll be bound! I'll give 'em a piece of my mind, if they want a piece of anything!" on her way to the front door.

But Susan was mistaken. Here were no beggars. "Land alive!" she cried. "It's the constable—and the—and a—you don't say it's—a prisoner!" for there was a woman apparently in their charge. "Don't you be frightened, miss; I'll see to 'em. I should jest think you men-folks that had any opinion of yourselves at all," she cried, turning on them with the fury of one of her own bantams, "would be ashamed to be disturbing two lone women at this time o' night! And you'll be no good as to say what you're after quick meire!"

Amy, while this voluble harangue proceeded, fell back in her seat, frightened, angry, insulted. What manner of evil was going to befall her now? Why were they bringing that woman in here? What were they doing with that woman anyway? Who was that woman?

"Don't be distressed, miss," said the officer. "We have a thief in custody; just out of the penitentiary yesterday, and ready to go in again to-morrow. And as some of the property found in her possession is marked with your name, we have brought her here, on our way, to identify it and——"

"With my name?" she asked, tremblingly. "Yes. These beads. The clasp—your name is engraved there. This cloak—your name is on the tape. This woman—has she been here? May we ask if you have seen her before?"

Had she seen her before? As the officer spoke he drew away the shawl which the woman had held wrapped round her head.

"She don't give a good account of herself," he said. "She says she was on the way home to her children, walking, and stopped here to rest, and when she told you that her children were starving——"

"They are!" said the woman, suddenly.

"You gave her the chain and—and the rest. Is that true, may we ask again? Have you ever seen her before?"

Had she ever seen her before? As Amy looked into those flaming topaz eyes—those hungry, angry eyes—she wondered where Susan's eyes had been in the morning. Ah, what a wreck was here—that other wreck she had so lately seen only its counterpart! Where were the blushes now, the dimples, the glances, the smiles, that had lured Allan to his fall, that had made a wreck, too, of all the peace of her own life? There was that bleared and bloated ruin reeling away from the back door; here was the woman who had caused it, with nothing left of her but the yellow shining eyes. Nothing? Yes, something left—the love of her children still! As Amy looked at her, suddenly all the fire and anger in her heart fell.

"Have you really any children?" she said.

"Are they truly starving?"

The woman shuddered into a heap on the floor.

"Oh, I have! They are!" she sobbed. "What will become of them if I go to jail again?"

In the draught from the door that had been insecurely closed and had burst open again with the wind, the lamps flared and were blown out, and the answering tongue of flame from the fire burned an instant in those cat-like eyes, on those wan, wringing hands, and seemed to fly for rest to the face and form of the girl, white and still as a statue's.

"I beg your pardon," she said to the officer, while some one relighted the lamps. "I was so bewildered by your sudden entrance! You asked me about those beads? I have given them to that woman. She was here this morning. My maid here heard me say she was welcome to them. They were mine. They are hers now. Why didn't you take the miniature case too?" she said, suddenly, turning to the woman and holding it out to her. "I said you might have that. Is that all you are holding her for? The cloak? The dress? Yes, they are hers, too."

Was she telling a lie herself? What would Mr. Brunton think of her?

In his last sermon he had said that a lie undermined the order of the universe. But Dr. Denham would have tried to save that wretched woman, those suffering children.

Besides, the things were Doris's own. She did give them to her. If it were not enough to give them while she spoke, Susan had heard her say the woman was welcome to one, and might have taken the other.

"Here, my poor woman," cried Amy, "I haven't a great deal of money, but take this too. I ought to have been more thoughtful, and have given it to you this morning."

And she took the bills from her little portmanteau, and went and crowded them into the woman's hand, and led her to the other door, and whispered something to her there, and came back into the room with her face white and shining.

To Dr. Denham, who happened to see the people enter the house and had followed them, it seemed upon that face the white and shining pallor of a saint; but Susan, who had stared at the whole proceedings with her mouth open, but too dry with wrath and wonder to speak, ran for the camphor bottle, clearing the men out of the house as she did so, and setting wide the door to air it after them.

When she opened her eyes, Dr. Denham was kneeling by the sofa, and his head was on her heart listening for a pulsation. She lifted her hand and laid it on his hair—the dark curly hair where only here and there a thread of silver shone.

"Oh! I am all right," she said.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were never coming out of it. I was afraid that among them they had killed you."

"I don't die so easily," she said, sitting up, and beginning to rearrange her drenched and fallen hair.

But he took down her hands, and held them both in one of his, taking the place beside her.

"In fact," said he, "you are just going to begin a new life."

And then, as her eyes met his, a flush surged over her white face, the lids fell till their fringes swept the burning cheeks; but she felt that his arm was about her, his head was bent above her, his lips—She shivered under that long kiss, as if happiness were something of which she had known so little that it awed her.

"Well," said Susan, bustling into the room an hour afterward, on some pretext of her own, and with the privilege of one woman who has all but reared another. "I suppose to-morrow ain't Christmas Day, and you ain't nothing to be thankful for now!"

"Oh, Susan!" said Amy, looking up in a sparkle of smiles and tears and blushes; "I've been so—so—"

"So unthankful. And so slow about taking up your blessings when they was set before that you fell kind o' strange about it now. Well, I come in to tell ye that I s'pose you'll be for asking the doctor here to eat his Christmas dinner to-morrow. But I don't see how you can, noways, for you give away the very last pie yourself, and that tramp's put his hand through the pantry winder and took away the turkey and the pudding, and there ain't a thing left. It's a dreadful, shiftless sort o' wife the doctor 'll think he's got if you go on as you've begun. And if he don't watch out on you, he won't have a thing left in his larder from day to another."

"The larder is full to-night, anyway," said the doctor. "And the best thing to be done is for you and Susan to pack your trunks and come over and eat your Christmas dinner with me. I'll come for you at twelve o'clock to-morrow morning, with a license and Mr. Brunton."

"I declare," said Susan, slowly withdrawing and closing the door behind her, "that cake as I made on the sly is a leading of providence. If I'd 'a' thought I was makin' weddin' cake when I stanned them raisins—I hope the ciron's cut rich. I wish I'd squirted the frosting on in scrolls instead of slabbin' it on with a knife. And I do' know how I'm ever to get on with the doctor's Molly. She can't draw a fowl so's 'twon't taste bitter in the breast, and to-morrer's dinner 'll be a poor show for me, though I don't suppose they'll know it from hector and ammonia. But if I'm going to bring that Molly into subjection, it's lucky for me that I begin when we're all in tune together on Christmas Day."

But as Susan closed the door, the doctor rose.

"I suppose her coming and going means that I should go too," he said, with a light laugh. "That cake of hers—"

How fine he was, she thought, as she looked up at him, standing there. How manly, how noble, how resolute, with the deep happiness in his eyes, in his smile, in his voice! What a life of well-doing had his been! How he had gone about doing the Master's work with his long waking nights beside the sick and dying, his cold drives up snowy hills, through storms and heat, every day a day of sacrifice to others! And she—

It never entered the doctor's thoughts to imagine that she was saying to herself that the heart that had so long held the image of that unclean thing was not clean enough for him.

He had thought to make the great step into the near and blessed future easy by treating it in a matter-of-fact way; but the flush had all flown from the sweet, pale face, and the tears were just ready to spin.

"My darling!" he exclaimed, as he felt the thrill of the little hand in his. "why do you tremble? Are you afraid of the shelter in the arms that will hold you against the world? Are you afraid to lean on this heart that only beats for you? But I have not loved so dearly and waited so long to venture any delays. I will not give the bird a chance to fly. I am going to make to-morrow the key-note of all the days of my life with you, every day of which will be a Christmas Day."

LAURA GRAHAM'S CHRISTMAS.

—o—

"I know that he will not fail me,
So I count every hour chime,
Every throb of my heart's beating
That tells of the flight of time."

—A. A. PROCTER.

"WELL," declared Mrs. Graham, coming into the cozy library, where Laura sat reading, "I must say that girl earns her wages!"

With a sigh of satisfaction, she sank into the arm-chair opposite the high-backed colonial rocker which held her pretty daughter.

"Everything that can be done in advance is done," explained Mrs. Graham. "The turkey trussed, the mince-pies made, and the cakes all frosted. It's her round and rosy countenance taking on the rapt expression of the good housekeeper who sees in anticipation her sparkling and tempting table—"if there is a festival I enjoy, it is Christmas."

Swift and sorrowful was the shadow which swept across Laura's face.

"I don't," she spoke low and vehemently; "I hate it!"

"Hate it! Oh, Laura!"

But as she recollects the reason lying at the root of the rebellious words, a look of gentle sympathy replaced her shocked expression.

Poor girl! Each Christmas must bring back the tragedy which had seemed to isolate her from youth and youthful pleasures. For one Christmas Eve—just six years ago it was—old Dudley Forbes, the financial and social magnate of the town had been found murdered in his room—shot through the head.

Suspicion had instantly fastened its fangs on the son and heir of the dead man. For was not it known that the day previous to the assassination a stormy interview concerning money matters had taken place between Harris Forbes and his father? and was not the revolver found beside the bed of the victim the property of the younger man?

So Harris Forbes was held by the coroner's jury to answer for the crime of parricide. But just before the term of court at which he was to be tried commenced, he had escaped from jail—disappeared.

There were some ugly rumours afloat that the jailer—whom it transpired the prisoner

had formerly befriended—had purposely left his keys accessible.

At all events Harris Forbes had vanished mysteriously, and if his fair little betrothed, Laura Graham, knew aught of the secret of his departure, she was silent—silent, and changed. From being the frankest, gayest, merriest of girls (she was only seventeen at the time) she had become a woman, grave, gentle, and reserved.

She did not shun society, and her admirers were many, but none were allowed to cross the line where friendship ended and love began.

The Grahams were in those pleasant circumstances called comfortable, and the little library where mother and daughter sat was a miracle of coziness and good taste.

Laura rose with a kind of shiver. She went over to the mantel, and held out her hands to the frolicking fire below. The figure outlined by the amber light was strong and symmetrical. The face above the pretty home-gown of old rose and silver was clear cut, firm-mouthed, purely pale, lit by shining gray eyes, and crowned with dark, braided hair.

"I'll go and take your old ladies their gifts, mamma, if you wish."

"Do dear!" said Mrs. Graham.

The old ladies in question were three poor women, to whom Mrs. Graham sent on festal occasions presents suited to the personal needs of each, and a small sum of money.

In half an hour Laura stepped into her own little pony phaeton, took the reins from the boy, and drove off through the bustling town, and along the level country road leading to her destination.

More than one pair of appreciative eyes had turned to look at her as she had passed down the main street—at the erect young figure in the tight-fitting coat of seal, and the sweet, pensive face under the ruby-winged hat.

But Laura was not thinking of gallants. She was remembering what she had said to Harris Forbes the night before his escape.

How convinced she had been of his innocence! how fearful of the possible verdict! And so she had implored him to fly, if possible. He and his family had done so much for Brigge, the jailer, she did not think he would find the man obdurate.

At first young Forbes was deaf to her pleadings—denied her prayers. But, being finally brought face to face with the certainty that he could not disprove his guilt, and being assured by the one he loved best that his conviction would kill her, he had promised to escape, if he could.

"I'll come back, sweetheart," he had said, "when I can prove my innocence. The day will come."

But that beautiful day seemed to the weary heart that waited as distant now as then.

Two of her errands done, Laura, homeward bound, checked her pony before a poor dwelling on the outskirts of the town, to deliver her remaining gifts.

The bright, crisp afternoon was growing dull and cold when she descended, secured her little brown horse, and approached the door.

There was no reply to her knock. She went in. The tidy, shabby apartment, which served as both living room and kitchen, was deserted.

It was something unusual for Mrs. Lamb to be absent from home. Laura decided she would sit down and wait a little while. By the fire stood a wooden chair. Of it the girl took possession.

A rather curious look she cast at a closed door opposite. In the room beyond lay Mrs. Lamb's sick son—"a poor child without sense" his mother had called him; "an idiot" the neighbours averred.

Laura was under the impression that the boy in question was quite helpless—paralyzed or something of the sort. He never of late years left his home, or indeed his room.

Dimmer grew the daylight. It was very quiet here—very quiet and very warm—and Laura was tired to the verge of exhaustion.

She had been up all the previous night with a little niece who was ill.

She leaned back and closed her eyes. How pleasant it was, this complete inaction! A quiet mental quietude, the stupor consequent on sleepless nights and incessant grieving crept slowly over her. Graciously she was falling asleep? That would never do. She would wait just a little longer.

Somehow the firelight and shadows whirled suddenly, dizzily together. She was asleep!

Tick, tick! went the clock in the corner. One—two—three—four—five! Ten minutes; then from behind the closed door came a slight sound, as of some jiggling or scraping. Then a subdued click at the key which had secured the door was pushed from within, and fell on the rug carpet covering the kitchen floor.

A sudden blaze in the grate-like stove made visible a flattened hand thrust under the door, the wood of which was shrunken.

This fingers snatched the key—withdrew it. An instant later it turned in the lock. The door flew back.

A masculine figure stumbled into the room—the figure of Mrs. Lamb's invalid son.

He stood still—looked around.

The form by the fireside attracted his attention.

"Who is she?" he muttered. "Not mother—who is she?"

He moved swiftly toward the shelf where lamp and matches always stood. He struck a match; lit the lamp. Holding the latter aloft, he went up to the wooden rocker, stood looking down on the sweet, still face below.

The bewilderment of his countenance was succeeded by a blurred kind of consciousness. "I know you now!" he cried out, suddenly—"I know you now!"

The harsh voice awakened Laura. Her white lids sprang wide. She sat erect. For just a second the light of the low-held lamp blinder.

"I know you!" croaked out the boy. "I used to see you long ago. You're the girl young Forbes was to marry—young Forbes, that they say killed his father!"

There was nothing of the coward about Laura Graham, but for once her brave heart quailed.

The creature confronting her was not the mere victim of rheumatism or paralysis. His was no physical ailment. The coarse, vacuous visage, the retreating forehead, the dull, glaring eyes, the lax jaw, the working mouth, all proclaimed him an imbecile—worse than that, a vicious idiot.

They say! He had put a good deal of meaning into those two words. What if he knew, had known—anything!

Fierce and fast came her breath. She would find out!

"Well, he did, didn't he?"

Her voice sounded strange to herself. It was shaking—unnatural. Every limb was rigid—tense.

"He? No, no, no!"

Sickeningly close to hers came the cowering, gibbering face.

"Who then?"

When she had spoken she feared the words were inaudible, so faintly they were said. But he had heard.

"I!" he panted—"I!"

"You!"

The lamp he held was smoking. The smoke drifted before his glaring eyes, giving him an appearance absolutely demoniac.

"Yes, I! You see, it was this way: The old man caught me on his grounds, stealing—I'd been stealing. He ordered me off, and hit me with his cane. I watched my chance. Three nights later I hid in the barn—got into the house. I knew—I'd heard the young master telling Mr. Beck where he kept his fine fire-arms. I found his revolver, sneaked to Dudley Forbes' room—shot him *dead!*"

Over the girl went sweeping a dizzying wave of exultation. Her lover would be proven guiltless yet—please God, he would!

"Mother said if folks knew they'd hang

me," croaked on Dick Lamb, "She locked me up. She'd let me see no one. To-night word came my sister's child was dying. She went off. I got out. Are you?" in abrupt suspicion, "going to tell on me?"

Not much longer could she endure this awful strain of a life with a madman. That she knew. She rose.

"Sit still," he growled. "To make sure, I'll kill you, too!"

He laid down the lamp. Nearer he came—nearer.

"Don't, for Heaven's sake—don't!"

Rage had made him deaf. Close—closer still—with knobs, claw-like hands outstretched. She could not pass. There was no way to evade him—none.

A single scream she uttered—fierce, shrill, full of inexpressible terror. Then she fell back, white and fainting.

In a high gig there were jogging along from the railway station, two men wrapped in great coats. One was slim and beardless, the other heavily built and wearing a dark moustache.

"Rather a reckless act of yours, dear old boy," the former was saying, "this return, glad though I am to see you."

"Perhaps so. I told Laura," with a rather bitter laugh, "I'd come back and prove my innocence. Well, I've come back, but I can't keep my promise."

For a while they rode on in silence. Then Doctor Young held up his hand.

"Listen!" he said.

The shriek which had startled him quivered out on the frosty air—died away.

"In Mrs. Lamb's house," he gasped, "and there—there is Laura's phantom at the gate!"

In less than it takes to write it both men were in the house, one tearing from Laura Graham's very throat the murderous fingers of the maniac, the other sternly confronting Mrs. Lamb, who had just returned.

"He done it, doctor—yes, the killing of old Forbes—but he knew no better!" she wailed.

And Laura? Laura came back from the land of shadows to meet her lover's ardent gaze.

"Harris!"

"Laura!"

"You will be cleared now."

"Yes, darling!"

And he was. The mother confessed the crime of her son and produced proofs of his guilt. He was incarcerated in an asylum.

Harris Forbes, who, unable to longer endure exile from Laura, and equally averse to asking her to share a branded name, had come home to stand his trial, was of course honourably acquitted.

This Christmas finds Laura the happiest of wives.

"Do you remember, dear," her mother asks, laughingly, "how a year ago you said you hated Christmas?"

"Did I say that? Well, now I've Harris. And," blushing deliciously, "I love him, you know—and—Christmas!"

FACETIA.

"Wives should never conceal anything from their husbands," says a writer. But women will persist in having pockets in their dresses.

GODARD: "So old Jaggs is dead. Did he leave many relations?" Golightly: "Yes, they are all left. He bequeathed his entire fortune to the church."

UGLY LOOKING WAYFARER: "Whar is the man o' the house?" Farmer's Wife, (with rare presence of mind): "He's back of the wood-shed, burying a tramp."

DONSBY, (a candidate): "Well, Jonsby, I am in the hands of my friends." Jonsby (a bankrupt: "I am slightly different," Donsby, I am in the hands of my creditors."

MISS PAULINE, (while out walking with her younger sister, thinks she is rudely treated): "Were you staring at me, sir?" Strange Gentleman: "Please, no, madam. I was admiring your little granddaughter." "Your son has settled down and married, I understand?" "Yes, and to the best and most sensible little lady in the world." "How came he to be so fortunate?" "Oh, he married a type-writer, one who was used to being dictated to."

THE "thought-reader" placed his hand on the man's head, withdrew it, and struck him a fearful blow on the nose. When the man got out from under the chair and asked the reader what he hit him for, he replied: "Just as I placed my hand on your head you thought I was a confounded fool, and I don't allow any man to think that, no matter if he's as big as a house!"

THE audacious Smith girl to that eligible, though elderly bachelor, Threlkell, Q.C.: "I can't think how you have resisted all the lovely girls who have thrown themselves at your head." "To tell you the truth, my dear young lady, I have been more than once tempted, but I have always cured myself by staring for a minute or so into a lady's requisite shop."

"Yes," said Miller to his neighbour across the fence, "the labouring men are in the right. It was time for them to rise against the tyranny of capital. Down with all the tyrants, I say." "John," shrieked a shrill voice from the kitchen, "are you going to chop that wood, and fetch up the water, or shall I have to come out to you?" "Yes, dear," he answered meekly, "I'll do it at once."

AN IRISHMAN who had been brought up in the country where stones lay loose about the fields, and the dogs, on account of the sheep, were kept in kennels, visited a city for the first time, when a dog rushed out and barked at him. He stooped and tried to pull a stone out of the pavement to fling at the cur, but found it fast. "Faith," said he, "this is a queer country where all the dogs are loose, and all the stones are tied!"

"You've lost him for good this time," said the barber to one of his shavers, as a customer went out and slammed the door behind him. "Yes, but I forgot." "That's no excuse. If you can't attend to your business, you must go." "What is the matter?" queried a reporter. "He didn't brush the man's head?" "But his head was as bald as a bone." "Certainly, and that's why he should have brushed it. Bald-headed men are very sensitive. You must use the brush the same as if they had plenty of hair. To do so gives them an idea that you don't take particular notice of their baldness." "And won't that man return?" "Never. He'll try some other shop next time, and will even advise his friends to keep away from here."

AN OLD SOLDIER, gin-soaked and garrulous, was in the habit of frequently dropping into the sanctum of an editor and pestering him with stories about his old campaigns and battles. One day he came just as the editor was in the bustle of "going to press"; and with the generous but ill-timed desire of giving information for an article on modern warfare, he laid a map on the desk, and proceeded to point out upon it the various positions in a battle in which he had taken part. "This," he said, pointing out, with the stump of a pencil, a certain part on the map, "is where the enemy were massed in front of us. Here," (pointing to another place), "is where our division was drawn up in the square. We deployed in this direction, and our left wing was attacked by the enemy on this knoll. Just at this point I was wounded on the left shoulder, and two hundred yards further on I got my right arm shattered by a piece of one of our own shells."

"But," broke in the irritated and sarcastic editor, who was an unfortunate stammerer, "where d-d-did you get y-y-your b-b-brains b-b-blowed out?"

SOCIETY.

The Prince of Wales is better, but does not look his old genial self, a worried and preoccupied expression having become almost habitual with him of late.

WHILE IN ENGLAND THE SHAH ACQUIRED AN AWFUL PASSION FOR CAPE-COATS. He wears them—of gorgeous hues, too—at all times and places.

INVENTOR EDISON'S SIX-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER IS SAID TO BE ALMOST MARVELLously BRIGHT. She is described as a fair musician, a good draughts-woman, and she speaks in four languages.

OUR READERS WILL, NO DOUBT, BE PLEASED TO LEARN THAT HER MAJESTY HAS EXPRESSED HER DISPLEASURE AT THE DISGRACIOUS SCENES WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN HUNTING TAME STAGS TO DEATH, SO THAT WE MAY NOW REASONABLY HOPE THAT THIS ORNAL PASTIME WILL RECEIVE ITS QUITS WHEN THE PRESENT SEASON IS OVER.

IT IS STATED THAT A GENTLEMAN WHO LIVES AT ISLINGTON IS PROVIDING LADIES WHOSE CHEEKS ARE HOLLOW WITH SMALL PADS. THESE PADS ARE ATTACHED TO NATURAL OR ARTIFICIAL TEETH BY MEANS OF TINY GOLD SPRINGS. THE PRICE OF A FACE PAD IS A TRIFLE HEAVY, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE GUARANTEED TO IMPROVE THE PERSONAL APPEARANCE.

THE FASHION OF FAINTING, LIKE THAT OF SLOPING SHOULDERS, IS A THING OF THE PAST. IT HAD A LONG LIFE, HOWEVER, AND FOR CENTURIES THE FAINTING HEROINE RULED THE HEART OF MEN. IT WAS THE CORRECT THING FOR WOMEN TO BE WEAK AND FLIMSY, AND A SLAVE TO MYSTERIES. NOW THESE QUALITIES ARE AT A DISCOUNT, AND SHE WHO WOULD WIN A MAN'S ADMIRATION MUST BE ROBUST AND ENERGETIC, SELF-CONTAINED, ELASTIC, AND, IN A WORD, HEALTHY.

PRINCESS IRENE OF HESSE, WHO HAS RECENTLY BEEN MARRIED TO PRINCE HENRY OF PRUSSIA, HAS RECEIVED A THOROUGH HOUSEWIFE'S TRAINING. SHE CAN, SEW, BAKE AND DO EVERYTHING SHE WOULD HAVE TO DO WERE SHE FATED TO BECOME THE WIFE OF A MAN NOT ABLE TO AFFORD SERVANTS. ALL THE PRINCESSES OF HESSE WERE TRAINED IN THIS WAY BY THEIR MOTHER, THE LATE GRAND DUCHESS, DAUGHTER OF QUEEN VICTORIA.

IN GERMANY THE PREPARATION OF CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S CAKES IS A MUCH MORE COMPLICATED BUSINESS THAN IN ENGLAND. THEY HAVE A SORT OF PLUM PUDDING THERE CALLED "SCHNIZBROD," COMPOSED OF MUCH THE SAME INGREDIENTS AS THE FORMER, BUT THE COMPOUND IS SENT TO THE BAKER TO BE FORMED INTO LOAVES. THE REAL CAKES FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON ARE A KIND OF HAUBKEE PRESSED INTO MOULDS, WHICH ARE ENGRAVED WITH A GREAT VARIETY OF OBJECTS, ESPECIALLY ANIMALS, FIGURES, FLOWERS, &c.

THE PRETTY STYLE WHICH THE LADIES HAVE ADOPTED OF COILING THE HAIR ON THE TOP OF THE HEAD AFTER THE FASHION OF A BIRD'S NEST, NATURALLY DEMANDS THAT THE PROPER USE OF A NEST SHOULD ALSO BE INDICATED. IT IS NOW THEREFORE THE CORRECT THING TO HAVE A FEW BIRD'S EGGS ARRANGED WITHIN THE SNUG CIRCLE, AND THESE ARE FASTENED ON TO A HAIR FOUNDATION AND SECURELY PINNED TO THE BOTTOM OF THE NEST.

WHEN THE QUEEN WAS ABOUT TO MARRY, SHE WAS ANXIOUS TO HAVE THE RANK AND TITLE OF KING CONSORT CONFERRED BY ACT OF PARLIAMENT ON PRINCE ALBERT. LORD MELBOURNE THOUGHT THE PROPOSAL AN UNWISE ONE, AND TRIED TO PASS IT OFF. HER MAJESTY, HOWEVER, PERSISTED, AND AT LAST LORD MELBOURNE SAID: "LET US HEAR NO MORE OF IT, MA'AM. IF YOU ONCE GET THE ENGLISH PEOPLE IN THE WAY OF MAKING KINGS, YOU WILL GET THEM INTO THE WAY OF UNMAKING THEM."

WOMEN WHO HAVE SLENDER, GRACEFUL FIGURES WILL BE QUITE WILLING TO ADOPT THE REVIVED FASHION OF LACING THE CORSETTE AT THE BACK. HOOKS AND EYES, WITH A DOUBLE ROW OF SMALL, FANCY BUTTONS SEWN ON AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE ON EITHER SIDE OF THE FASTENING, IS ANOTHER REVIVAL. INVISIBLE FASTENINGS ARE, HOWEVER, STILL VERY FASHIONABLE AND THEY OCCUR IN UNUSUAL PLACES; THE SEAM BEHIND THE LEFT ARM AND THE RIGHT SHOULDER SEAM ARE UTILIZED BY MANY DRESSMAKERS TO PROVIDE MEANS OF EGREG AND INGRESS TO THE WEAVER.

STATISTICS.

OVER FORTY THOUSAND GIRLS ATTENDED THE COOKING CLASSES IN ENGLAND LAST YEAR.

THE CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD NUMBER ABOUT 388,200,000. THERE ARE ABOUT 483,000,000 BUDDHISTS.

THE DEATH-RATE ON THE EARTH IS CALCULATED TO BE 67 IN A MINUTE, OR 4,020 AN HOUR, 96,480 A DAY, 35,215,200 A YEAR.

THERE IS A RELIGIOUS SECT FOR EVERY 7,333 PERSONS IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA, OR 150 DENOMINATIONS FOR 1,100,000 PEOPLE.

LONDON HAS FEWER INHABITANTS TO THE HOUSE THAN ANY OTHER OF THE GREAT CITIES OF EUROPE. VIENNA HAS THE MOST PERSONS TO THE HOUSE, HAVING FIVE TIMES AS MANY AS LONDON.

GEMS.

AN EVEN MIND IS NEVER A PREJUDGED ONE. IT IS CERTAINLY MUCH EASIER WHOLLY TO DECIDE A PASSION THAN TO KEEP IT WITHIN JUST BOUNDS AND MEASURE; AND THAT WHICH FEW CAN MEDIATE ALMOST ANYBODY MAY PREVENT.

WOMAN IS AN ENIGMA. SHE WILL FACE A FROWNING WORLD AND CLING TO THE MAN SHE LOVES THROUGH THE MOST BITTER SEASON OF TRIAL AND ADVERSITY, BUT SHE WON'T WEAR A HAT THREE WEEKS BEHIND THE STYLE TO SAVE THE GOVERNMENT.

A MAN WHO DWELLS ON FAILURE WITH DISCONTENT CONDEMNS HIMSELF OF LITTLENESS. WE CANNOT BE MASTERS OF OURSELVES TILL OUR SOVEREIGNTY HAS BEEN CHALLENGED AND PROVED. THE SOLITARY SHOCK COMES ON THIS SIDE AND THAT, AND THE COURAGEOUS SOFFERER IS TAUGHT THE WEALTH OF HIS RESOURCES.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HINTS.—THE BEST WAY TO SOFTEN LEATHER SHOES THAT HAVE BEEN WET IS TO SPONGE THEM WELL WITH KEROSENE; ALL ODOUR PASSES AWAY FROM THE LEATHER IN A SHORT TIME.

APPLE CREAM.—SIX LARGE APPLES; STEW AND MASH THEM TO A PULP. WHEN COLD, ADD THE WHITES OF SIX EGGS WELL BEATEN. ADD FIVE SPOONFULS OF SUGAR, AND FLAVOUR TO TASTE.

BREAKFAST FISH.—PICK ONE CUPFUL OF SALFISH QUITE FINE, LET IT SOAK IN LUKEWARM WATER, PREPARE TWO CUPS OF MASHED POTATOES WITH ONE CUP OF MILK, TWO EGGS, TEASPOONFUL OF BUTTER, A LITTLE PEPPER; SQUEEZE THE FISH FROM THE WATER, MIX IT WITH THE OTHER INGREDIENTS, AND BAKE IN A BUTTERED DISH HALF AN HOUR.

OYSTERS ON TOAST.—Lay plump oysters in a dripping pan, just enough to cover the bottom, and to a cup of liquor from the oysters add half a cup of cream. Pour enough over the oysters to moisten them. Set in a hot oven. Have ready some pieces of toast cut in diamond shape and well buttered. As soon as the oysters are ruffled sprinkle salt and pepper over them and lay on the toast, moistening it with the liquor. Send to the table very hot.

A VERY GOOD CHRISTMAS CAKE:—1lb. BUTTER, 13lb. FLOUR, 2lb. CURRANTS, 1lb. LOAF SUGAR, 1oz. ALMONDS, ONE NUTMEG, 1lb. CANDIED PEEL; TEN EGGS, ONE WINE GLASS OF BRANDY. BEAT THE BUTTER TO A CREAM, SIFT THE SUGAR THROUGH A SIEVE, WASH AND PICK OVER THE CURRANTS, PEEL THE ALMONDS AND CUT INTO SLIPS, GRATE THE NUTMEG, CUT UP THE PEEL. BEAT INTO THE CREAMED BUTTER THE SUGAR AND SPICE, AND GO ON BEATING FOR FIFTEEN MINUTES. PUT THE TEN YOLKS WELL BEATEN IN, GRADUALLY, STIRRING. BEAT THE TEN WHITES TO A FROTH AND PUT IN GRADUALLY. ADD THE ALMONDS, CURRANTS, AND PEEL, AND MIX WELL. NOW PUT IN THE FLOUR little by little, and last of all the BRANDY. BAKE IN A MODERATE OVEN FOR TWO HOURS IN A TIN, LINED WITH PAPER, AND KEEP FROM BURNING.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN RUSSIA THE TELEGRAPHIC SYSTEM IS UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL. ONE OF ITS RULES ENJOINS THAT NO FEMALE TELEGRAPHIST SHALL MARRY ANY ONE NOT EMPLOYED AS A TELEGRAPHIC OPERATOR, AND IT ALSO REQUIRES THAT IN CASE OF SICKNESS THE WIFE SHALL BE THE SUBSTITUTE OF THE MAN, AND PERFORM DOUBLE SERVICE. THERE IS NO WOMAN'S JOURNAL IN RUSSIA, AND MORE'S THE PITY.

A CALIFORNIA PAPER MENTIONS SOME OF THEpeculiarities of the fig. It has no blossoms, and evidently requires breathing places, for from the little button at the end there are minute ducts or air spaces which run through the fruit and open into the stem. If, in drying, the fig is not placed as it grew on the trees, the fruit soars and moulds. The fruit does not hang from the tree, but inclines upward, held by the stem, and this button, or mouth, opens towards the sun. If not so placed when being dried the button is shaded, and the fruit then spoils.

THE ORIGIN OF THE PHRASE "NINE TAILORS MAKE A MAN" IS NOT CLEAR. SOME HOLD THAT IT ORIGINATED thus: A BOY WAS APPRENTICED TO A TAILOR, WHO KEPT NINE JOURNEYMEN. THEY TAUGHT HIM THE TRADE; HE PROSPERED, AND BECAME AN EMPLOYER, AND SAID NINE TAILORS HAD MADE HIM A MAN. OTHERS ACCOUNT FOR IT IN THIS WAY: A TOLL OF A BELL, THEY SAY, IS CALLED A "TELLER," AND AT THE DEATH OF A MAN THE DEATH-BELL USED TO BE TOLLED THIRTY THREE TIMES. "NINE TELLERS MARK A MAN," BECAME PARAPHRASED INTO "NINE TAILORS MAKE A MAN." YOU CAN CHOOSE BETWEEN THE TWO.

WHEN A BANK OF ENGLAND NOTE IS CASHED AT THE BANK, IT IS NEVER ISSUED AGAIN. NO NOTE PASSES OUT OF THE BANK A SECOND TIME, EVEN THOUGH IT HAD BEEN ISSUED TEN MINUTES BEFORE. WHEN IT IS RETURNED TO THE BANK, A CORNER OF IT IS TORN BY THE CLERK WHO RECEIVES IT; ITS NUMBER IS RECORDED AS PAID, AND IT IS THEN STORED AWAY. AT THE END OF TEN YEARS FROM THE TIME OF PAYMENT IT IS BURNED. ONCE A MONTH THERE IS A NIGHT TO SADDEN THE EYES OF MONEY-LOVERS. ALL THE NOTES CASHED IN THAT MONTH, TEN YEARS BEFORE, ARE CONSUMED. THE FURNACE IS SEVEN FEET HIGH BY TWELVE IN DIAMETER, AND THE MONTHLY DESTRUCTION OF NOTES IS OFTEN SUFFICIENT TO TWICE FILL THE FURNACE.

"PHOTOGRAPHS OF LADIES IN WATCHES ARE BECOMING VERY POPULAR. A YOUNG GENTLEMAN WHOSE ORDER WE HAVE JUST TAKEN, WISHES THE PORTRAIT OF HIS INTENDED WIFE PLACED IN THE CHRONOMETER. THE FACE OF THE YOUNG LADY WILL BE PHOTOGRAPHED DIRECTLY ON THE INNER CASE OF THE WATCH. DURING THE PAST MONTH WE HAVE TAKEN ORDERS FOR OVER 300 PHOTOGRAPHS. ALL OUR WORK IS DONE BY A FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHER, AND ONCE A PRETTY FACE IS PLACED IN A WATCH BY HIS METHOD IT WILL REMAIN AS LONG AS THE WATCH LASTS. AND ANOTHER THING," SAID THE JEWELLER, WITH A SLY WINK, "WHEN ONCE A MAN PLACES THE PICTURE OF HIS SWEETHEART, OR, IF HE IS MARRIED, HIS WIFE, IN HIS WATCH, THE CHANCES ARE NINETY-NINE TO ONE THAT IT WILL NEVER FIND ITS WAY TO A PAWNBROKER'S."

IN JAPAN, WHOLE FAMILIES OF ARTIFICES WORK TOGETHER AT HOME, EACH PERSON PERFORMING HIS ALLOTTED SHARE OF THE LABOUR. ONE MAN MAY BE DEFLY FASHIONING WOODEN TRAYS, WHILE A LITTLE BOY RUBS THEM SMOOTH WITH SAND-PAPER, AND TWO DAUGHTERS LAY A GLUTINOUS FOUNDATION WHICH RENDERS THE WOOD IMPERVIOUS TO MOISTURE. THE WIFE MAKES DESIGNS, THE HUSBAND INLAIDS UPON THEM PIECES OF MOTHER-OF-PEARL OR IVORY, AND THE GRANDMOTHER CONTRIBUTES THE CONSEAL BORN OF EXPERIENCE. AN INTENDING PURCHASER ONCE DEMURRED AT THE PRICE OF A CURIOUSLY WROUGHT METAL DISH, WHEREUPON THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY REPLIED, "REMEMBER THAT THIS DISH OCCUPIED ALL OF US WHOM YOU SEE SITTING HERE FOR A PERIOD OF EIGHT MONTHS. RENT, CLOTHES, AND FOOD ARE REPRESENTED BY THAT WORK OF ART. IF YOU CONSIDER THE MATTER IN THIS LIGHT, YOU WILL NOT FIND THE DISH DEAR."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

D. D.—A bill of sale for £20 would be illegal and void.
Bon.—Dynamite, three syllables, the first of them short.

J. B.—The distance between Deptford and the Old Bailey would be about four miles.

JACK'S BROTHER.—The German Emperor did not march through Paris; his troops occupied the city for twenty-four hours only.

TRADESMAN.—A travelling draper ought to have a pedlar's license, which costs five shillings, and can be obtained from the police.

SALLY B.—You may assume and use an additional Christian name if you desire to do so, but you cannot now have it entered on the registrar's books.

T. T.—No dogs are exempt from tax, unless they are kept exclusively for guiding blind persons, or for tending cattle or sheep on a farm, or by shepherds.

J. D.—You are not in any way responsible for the support of a wife who has lived with another man. Only a lawyer can tell you the cost of a divorce.

LIZZIE.—The Princess of Wales is addressed as "Ma'am," by those about her; the more formal "Madam," is out of use, at least for the present.

MARY.—1. The children would all have an equal right to the property of their father. 2. See answer to "Mud-lark." 3. The gentleman is always introduced to the lady.

TRROUBLED.—There is no way of getting rid of the spots, except pinching them out. You write a very legible hand, which should be suitable for any business purposes.

A. W.—In our opinion it is the dressmaker who should be indignant. If you do not pay her, after promising to do so, she has a perfect right to keep your dress till you do so.

IGNORANT FUM.—The letters indicate that a reply is expected to the invitation; they stand for the French words, "Répondez, s'il vous plaît," which in English means, "Reply, if you please."

BERTHA.—Try using a little cold cream at night before you go to bed; it has an excellent effect on a rough skin. The yellowness probably arises from causes that no outward application will affect.

CONSTANT READER.—The mode of stuffing animals, birds, and fishes is too elaborate to be told in our limited space. You would obtain all information at a trifling cost from a regular stuffer.

THIN GIRL.—1. No outward application will fatten the face. 2. Fruit is not usually fattening; eat plenty of sugar and all kinds of farinaceous food if you wish to get fat. 3. The bride removes her own glove.

C. C.—1. We do not know that any of the bronze collages has been withdrawn from circulation. 2. If a wife carries on business separately from her husband, and on her own account, the husband has no claim upon the profits.

S. S.—A marriage license costs two pounds ten shillings; it is obtainable at Doctor's Commons, St. Paul's Churchyard. The fees at the church depend very much on circumstances. We thank you for your good opinion of the "Bieder."

J. WORTH.—Eggs boiled hard will keep for weeks if the shells are unbroken. Only new laid eggs are good this way, as if there is the slightest flavour of straw about them—which shop eggs are apt to get—it becomes intensified by cooking, and is very disagreeable.

NELLIE.—We should not decidedly refuse him, because that would make him so very unhappy, and it might have a very bad effect upon him besides. Only wait a little before decidedly accepting him, so that he might have time to be sure that his affection will endure.

B. B.—Historians tell us that fully three thousand people are believed to have perished under charge of witchcraft during the period of the Long Parliament; that is to say, at the very time when the seeds of civil and religious liberty were being planted in old England.

LAURA.—You can do nothing. Young ladies should never, under any circumstances, seek to attract the attention of gentlemen. If he wishes to speak to you again, he will find an opportunity; but you ignored him of your own free will, and can hardly expect him to notice you.

ELsie.—The persons entrusted with the custody of the child have no right to detain her against the wishes of the mother. They can sue her for the money promised and due for maintenance. As to the mode of recovering the child the mother must obtain the advice of a lawyer, as she may have to take legal proceedings.

A. F.—July was named for Julius Caesar and August for Augustus Caesar. Originally August had but thirty days and February twenty-nine in the common year and thirty in leap years. Augustus was jealous that Julius' month should have more days than his own, therefore took one from February and added it to August.

DICK.—In Syria the people never take off their caps or turbans when entering the house or visiting a friend, but they always leave their shoes at the door. There are no mats or scrupps outside, and the floors inside are covered with expensive rags, kept very clean in Moslem houses and used to kneel upon while saying prayers.

PUZZLED JACK.—Niagara Falls² are continually changing shape, owing to the force of the water wearing away the rocky bed. It is almost a misnomer to call the Canadian portion the "Horseshoe Fall," and now so large a section of rock has suddenly given way in the exact centre of the cataract that the alteration is very remarkable.

A READER.—We hardly know what you mean by your question. Good silver is always fashionable, and should always be used at breakfast. The silver would be properly arranged in front of the mistress of the house, or whoever pours out tea and coffee. For afternoon tea it would be brought in on the tray with the cups, saucers, etc., and put down on the table covered with a white cloth.

NEW YORKER.—The order of cities in population is: London, 4,149,530; Paris, 2,344,582; New York, 1,520,065; Berlin, 1,206,577; Vienna, 1,103,857; Philadelphia, 1,045,698; St. Petersburg, 920,100; Tokio, 903,837; Constantinople, 873,565; Calcutta, 871,504. Canton, China, is popularly supposed to have 1,600,000 inhabitants; recent travellers think that 500,000 is much nearer the real figure.

FAIR-HAIRED JANE.—The following is an excellent hair-wash, very useful for stimulating the skin and making the hair grow:—Half-an-ounce of olive oil, half-an-ounce of spirits of hartshorn, one ounce of rose water, one ounce of tincture of camphardine, two ounces of spirits of wine, three ounces of san-de-Cologne. Shake well together and rub into the skin of the head night and morning.

IGNORANT JACK.—"The Lion Sermon" is the title of a discourse preached annually at St. Katherine Cree, Leadenhall-street. The rector has explained the title. "In his laudable efforts to acquire wealth, Sir John Gayer, while in the East, missed his caravan, and was met by a lion. In the face of the wild beast he knelt to ask for protection, and through his faith the mouth of the lion was stopped."

CAN YOU TELL ME?

Can you tell me why this should be,
In every land on every sea,
Why sun should always shine for some,
And shadows over others come?
Can you tell me?

Can you tell me why honest toll
Should be defrauded of the spoil;
Why poverty, and grief, and gall
Should be so great, and sweetness small?
Can you tell me?

Can you tell me why buds unmade
Should blossom, and then drop and fade?
Why little children pure and free,
Should sinful men and women be?
Can you tell me?

Can you tell me why woman's lot
Is so ill-fated, and man's is not;
Why she, the weaker of the pair,
Must still the greater burden bear?
Can you tell me?

Can you tell me when all is done,
The curtain dropped at set of sun,
Why man of man speaks words of praise
When he needs not the wasted lay?
Can you tell me?

J. T.

MABEL.—Without knowing something about your position in life and pecuniary circumstances it is impossible for us to advise you what kind of a present you might give to the gentleman to whom you are engaged. What do you say to working a pair of slippers for him? That would be, in most cases, a very acceptable present, and one on which you could bestow as much labour and expense as you might wish.

POOR ANN.—We do not know of any London society for training ladies in laundry work. In answer to your inquiry we can see no unfitness in your writing for domestic work. The salaries paid vary so widely that it is impossible to give you any probable rate. Your only practical plan would be to advertise your requirements in the *Times* or *Morning Post*, stating your qualifications for such work.

THIRTYFIFTH.—You will find nothing so useful or so lasting as a good black dress of silk. That material can be worn a long time without being soiled, and, when it is, the goods will wash very nicely. If you like colours better than black, get either a satin or a serge in brown or maroon. Why braid the dress for your little girl? It will look just as well made plainly, that is, without so much work. Children outgrow their clothes so fast that we think it almost useless to put unnecessary work upon them.

ONE IN DOUBT.—Albinos, according to Humboldt, are more common among nations of dark skin, and inhabiting hot climates. In the copper-coloured races they are more rare, and still more so among whites. It is stated that in the same family several children are sometimes born albinos, and that they are generally of the male sex. An instance is recorded of a Welsh family, in which every alternate child was an albino. It is also stated that two albinos married, and had two children that were not albinos, but of quite brown colour. Albinism arises from the absence of the minute particles of colouring matter which ordinarily occur in the lowest and last deposited layers of the epidermis or outer skin, and to the presence of which the skin owes its colour.



SEA BOY.—The Doggerbank is a great flat sandbank, about a hundred miles off the Yorkshire coast. It is a favourite fishing ground.

L. M.—An Act of Parliament passed in 1865 converted Greenwich Hospital into an infirmary only. Further Acts of 1869-72 regulated what are known as the Greenwich out-pensions.

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.—H.M.S. *Eurydice*, a training ship, founded off the Isle of Wight on March 24, 1878. The captain and about 300 men perished. For their names you had better consult the contemporary newspapers.

AMATEUR.—To have an excellent glue always on hand, fill a glass jar with broken-up glue of the best quality, and then add enough acetic acid to almost overflow the jar, which keep in hot water for a few hours until the glue is melted.

MIDLANDS.—Birmingham is a city. That title was conferred upon it by Royal Charter dated 14th January, 1889. It has a Roman Catholic cathedral, and is the seat of a Roman Catholic bishop. The title was conferred to celebrate the jubilee of the municipality.

ANNIE.—The bridegroom supplies the bouquets for bride and bridesmaids, and sometimes for the bride's mother. The bridegroom supplies one carriage only—that in which he drives with his bride from the church, and afterwards to the railway station. The guests provide their own carriages.

IGNORANT.—Zee is Danish for sea; as Zealand, (Zealand), "seeland," or land nearly surrounded by the sea, and Eyer or Zuyder, is Dutch for south, so that Zuyder Zee means South Sea, and it was so-called because it was the great southern arm of the North, or German Ocean. It was once a lake, but in 1362 became united, by an inundation, with the German Ocean, of which it is really a gulf.

IGNORANT.—Volapuk, as we have before said, in answer to other correspondents, is the invention of a German Catholic priest, Rev. Johann Martin Schleyer, of Constance, in Baden. His system was published in 1879. The merits claimed for it are its extreme simplicity, its grammar containing no artificial genders and no irregular verbs, and no sound being employed which is not common in all parts of the world; every word is accented on the last syllable, and the orthography is strictly phonetic.

DOUBTFUL.—A cold sponge bath is only injurious to weakly persons. If quickly got over and followed by a brisk rubbing, with a coarse towel, anyone in fair health ought to derive nothing but benefit from such a bath, even in quite cold weather. But the safest rule is to be guided by one's after-feeling. If the bath leaves a sensation of chill or languor, it is doing harm, and should be discontinued. But if the rubbing be followed by a pleasant glow of warmth, the bath may be kept up with advantage, in spite of the weather.

ANNIE S.—To make crumpets, take one ounce of butter, one quart of milk, three eggs, as much sifted flour as will make a batter, a little salt, and one gill of fresh yeast. Put the butter in the milk, and warm them together, beat the eggs very light, and add them to the milk, stir in as much sifted flour as will make a batter rather thicker than for buckwheat cakes, and salt to taste. Lastly, stir in one gill of fresh yeast. Cover and set them in a warm place to rise. When light, bake on a griddle, butter, and place them on the table hot.

VALENTINE.—No expert can always tell a genuine diamond at a mere glance, as some people suppose. The method employed for determining the genuineness of diamonds at the Brazilian mines is to rub them with black mastic, which will adhere to the gem if it is real. The best of all tests, though, is that of refraction. Unlike all other crystals, the diamond has not a double refracting power, which means that objects looked at through it do not appear as if multiplied by two. If you have a diamond of which you are doubtful, look at it a pin through it. If you see two pins, the stone is false.

V. V.—1. Try using a little cold cream to your face when you go to bed; it has been recommended by a correspondent as useful in the removal of freckles. The only real remedy for them is patience; they should go away in cold weather. But the best thing of all is prevention; do not expose your skin to the sun if you can help it. 2. Camphorated chalk is the best tooth powder that we know. 3. Have patience, and the sweetheart will come in time. 4. No modest girl ever thinks of trying to secure one. 4. Nothing but the greatest attention to cleanliness will remove the evil.

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†† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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